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Vol. I.

SINGLE NUMBER.

October 4, 1879.

TOUSEY & SMALL, PUBLISHERS,
116 NASSAU STREET, N. Y.

Subscription price,
\$2.50 per year.

PRICE
5 CENTS.

No. 169.

Harkaway to the Rescue.



Yes, there was Hunston, sitting up in his coffin—bolt upright. Toro started back aghast with fright.

CHAPTER I.

TORO'S RESOLVE—THE BAG OF JEWELS IN THE DEAD-HOUSE—ROBBING A CORPSE—A SCENE OF TERROR.

TORO waited in great impatience for the hour when he could safely venture upon the daring expedition that he had in view.

The jewels and money which Hunston carried stitched in the lining of his coat, must be his.

They had been their joint property, and was

not he the sole person who could have any claim to them?

Beyond doubt.

Persons might have been found, with the assistance of Toro and Hunston—had he been alive—who had certainly a prior claim to the valuables.

Yet Toro felt that they were his, and come what might, he would not be robbed of his own.

Accordingly he waited until the whole of his particular ward slept.

And, when all the long, spacious dormitory

was hushed in slumber, he sat up and groped beneath his pillow for his knife.

He had contrived to secrete that about his person, in spite of the close and vigilant search which was made of his garments upon his entrance into the lazaretto.

Besides the knife, he had secured a small lamp, which he had ready now for work.

Slowly, gently, he arose and glided off his bed.

The guardian of the ward lay dozing in his chair, not ten feet from where Toro stood, and

as the latter's bed creaked, he half opened his eyes.

"Eh, what? Who's there?" he mumbled.

And while Toro clutched his knife firmly, the old man grumbled and muttered incoherently.

Then he slept again.

Ay, slept and snored.

Toro stepped out towards the door, the boards creaking with a noise which, to the Italian's anxious ear, seemed loud enough to awake the dead.

Slowly, cautiously, he gained the door.

He passed through, and then he began to breathe again.

Toro's destination was the dead house of the lazaretto.

The dead house was a separate building altogether.

To reach it, he was bound to pass out by the hall door.

Toro stepped on, but barely made any progress in the hall, where his boots seemed agreed with the stone paving to create a discord, and creak out words of warning to those on guard.

Down went Toro on his knees, and he crept along, holding his knife between his teeth.

The Italian brigand was desperate now.

Had that hall-porter woke up, it is probable that there would have been another customer for the dead-house of the lazaretto that night.

Luckily for him, he slept, all unconscious of the brigand's presence.

The bolts stuck.

He used a deal of bad language, but as it was under his breath, and moreover, in Italian, there is no need to shock the reader with it.

"Ha-ha," he muttered, in real satisfaction.

The door was open.

He was outside, at liberty.

Yes, at liberty, for he was so far ungrateful for the benefit of that excellent charity, as to regard his life there in the light of bondage.

He crossed the spacious courtyard, and there, upon his left, stood the ugly mausoleum, the dead-house of the lazaretto.

There was a dull, dim light, twinkling feebly through a small window in the building, and this served him as a guide,

He groped his way along until he came to the door, and felt for the catch.

But there was none.

The door gave way slowly before him, and as he passed through, closed behind him with a spring.

The click startled him, for now he was alone with the dead—Hunston, his comrade, and Jack Harkaway's old schoolfellow and bitter foe.

The position was unpleasant.

Still, he had come for the special purpose of doing the business in hand alone and unseen; why should he fear?

Yet fear he did, bold, burly ruffian that he was.

His nation are proverbially superstitious, and for a superstitious man, it was not a pleasant locality.

All was gloom and darkness.

But, by degrees, his keen vision pierced the obscurity, and he began to distinguish the ghostly objects by which he found himself surrounded.

It was a long, vaulted chamber, with rows of shelves all around, upon which was a grim array of coffins.

In the center of the room was a long table fixed upon trestles, upon which rested two coffins.

These were the last silent visitors to the dead house.

Toro shivered a little as his eye rested upon them.

But he did not mean to shirk his self-set task.

With a slow, but firm hand, he removed the lid of the nearest coffin, and placed it noiselessly down.

He could not endure the faintest sound then.

Why?

Did he fear to disturb the rest of those silent occupants of the long, ugly boxes?

No.

He knew well enough that all he could do would not accomplish this.

The dead would never notice his intrusion did he fire cannon beside them.

Never—never!

And as his thoughts wandered, he started and looked around.

Was it fancy, or did the coverings of the dead really move?

"It must be the weakness of my nerves that causes this feeling," thought Toro. "Away with such childish folly."

But he felt a sinking at his breast, and he wondered at the unaccountable dread which had fallen upon him.

Had he grown womanish? he asked himself.

It was not the first time that he found himself in the presence of death.

Not the first by a great many times.

Beneath the sheet was the shroud of the ghostly occupant.

Now to ascertain if the first was Hunston, it was but necessary to draw back the top cover of the winding-sheet.

Yet his courage almost failed him at this moment.

He had to pause a long while ere he could screw it up to the requisite pitch; but he did it, and then he saw—not Hunston, but a withered old man with an open mouth and sunken cheeks and a horrible grin.

A pair of glassy eyes were open and fixed as it seemed in menace upon the bold man who thus broke in upon the silent repose of the dead.

The ruffian gasped.

He drew back and let fall the cover of the shroud.

In his first sensation of fright, he would have made for the door; but he could not find it at once, and he managed to conquer that impulse and stick to his self-set task.

He reflected upon his wretched, penniless condition, and he bethought him of the object of the visit there.

Hunston's hidden treasure must be his at any cost.

Averting his gaze from the other coffin, he passed on to the next, and here, screwing his courage up to the requisite pitch, he stretched forward his hand.

A moment's irresolution here occurred.

No more.

Fighting desperately with his superstitious dreads, he dragged back the shroud from the face of the corpse and then drew cowering back.

"How horrible!" he thought.

How weird and ghastly do the dead appear.

He gained courage presently and returned to face it.

Yes, it was Hunston, surely enough.

Hunston in the flesh, if not in the spirit, yet far less changed corporeally than Toro had expected to find him.

Traces of his last sufferings were to be seen in his face plainly enough; yet he could not think that this looked like the face of a dead man.

The face was pale, it is true; yet it was not the pallor of the grave.

"Poor Hunston!" mused Toro, as he gazed upon the face of the dead man, "he was right enough in his sad predictions, but I did not think that it would come about so very soon; but now for his money bag. Now for it."

It was to be done, and therefore, the quicker the better; but although he did his best to assume an air of boldness, he felt unnerved.

His hand shook like that of a palsied wretch as he fearfully withdrew the winding-sheet.

His hand jerked against the body once, and then he started back horror-stricken; his heart leaped to his mouth and his hair raised up on his scalp.

Had the dead walked, he could not have been more scared.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered in a subdued tone.

The murmur was whispered in the four corners of the dead-house, and echoed back to his frightened ears a ghostly moan.

He plucked up by degrees, and tremblingly returned to the body, when just as his hand rested upon it, the clock of the chapel tolled the three-quarters.

He started again.

How every sound affrighted him!

"Only fifteen minutes more," thought Toro, "before they come. I must be quick."

He groped along the coffin for the bag, but there was no sign of it there.

"They have robbed me!" he gasped; "I am cheated, swindled by these pious thieves! But I'll be revenged; I'll fire this accursed den. I'll burn them all in their beds—I'll—I'll—"

He paused for breath, and for the dire threats of vengeance, for although pretty fertile in this sort of matter, his invention seemed to fail him now.

He could think of nothing worse than burning his benefactors in their beds.

"What's that?"

His hand touched something hard against the left side of the body.

He pressed eagerly down and felt the outline of the bag itself.

"Hurrah!"

Here it was surely enough.

He dragged back the sheet, and caught at the bag, but the white drapery yet enveloping the body baffled him.

Do what he would, he could not find the end of it.

Well, it was useless repining, so he set to work with his knife and cut out a square piece of the sheet.

In the midst of this task, the lamp he had brought flickered and gave up the ghost, and then the only light proceeded from the feeble oil lantern hung upon the wall at the further end of the chamber.

This startled him and caused his hand to slip, so that the knife struck the corpse and penetrated a good inch.

There was no particular harm in this, nor would the fact have been worth mentioning but for a remarkable look of the linen as he withdrew the knife with a jerk.

A long, dark stain showed where the knife had pierced.

He looked on with a vague sensation of fear, for he at once knew the nature of the stain.

Blood!

"Why, how's this?" he gasped, aloud. "Dead men don't bleed!"

But now his hand grasped Hunston's jewel bag, and greed got the better of fear.

He dragged at it, and having to apply greater force to it he bent over the body, when suddenly, to his intense horror, it moved!

"Great mercies!" he faltered, closing his eyes.

At that instant an icy hand fastened upon his throat, and as the Italian felt the hideous touch of the cold hand, he gasped for mercy.

His tongue clung to the roof of his mouth—he endeavored to cry out—but in vain.

A slight gurgling noise was heard in his throat.

"It is the death clutch!" was all he could articulate.

And then he fell over the body, half insensible.

CHAPTER II.

ALARMING NEWS—THE ENGLISH VISITORS—TORO REBELS—THE MAD WOMAN—THE PADDED ROOM.

AT the moment that the brigand Toro fell fainting over Hunston's body, the great bell of the lazaretto rang out a loud peal of alarm.

Clang—clang—clang! went the iron tongue, and in the space of a few minutes all the place was in an uproar.

Toro, horribly frightened, felt his brain on fire with the confusion prevailing.

He fought with the hand that pressed upon his throat, as soon as he had recovered his senses sufficiently to realize what was going forward.

The alarm bell brought him to his wits again, and he began to understand now the danger he was running.

He remembered the tales of the previous days about sacrilegious people who had robbed the dead, and the thought of the penalty for sacrifice roused him at once.

With a mighty effort he struggled up and set himself free from the clutch that had held him, and dragging himself up he found himself face to face with Hunston.

Yes, there was Hunston, sitting up in his coffin—bolt upright.

Toro started back agast with fright.

The pale face of Hunston was close to his, and his glassy eyes fixed steadfastly on him.

But the explanation rushed into Toro's brain.

In his frantic endeavors to free himself from the singular entanglement with the corpse, he had dragged it up into a sitting posture.

He thrust it back, but to his intense dismay the right arm was thrust out again, and at the same time a low, moaning voice breathed his name.

"Toro."

The Italian reeled back.

He stared at the body with eyes half starting from their sockets.

"Hunston!" he gasped, barely above a whisper.

The body of his former comrade gravely bowed his head.

Toro stared frozen with terror.

Cold drops of perspiration stood out in big beads upon his forehead.

"Speak, Hunston, speak," breathed the wretched man in accents of unspeakable horror; "do you live, indeed? Do my eyes cheat me, or is this some devilish juggling of the fiend himself?"

"Toro."

"Yes—yes, speak," cried the Italian, eagerly.

"Speak, if you are really alive."

"How cold it is—I'm so thirsty—don't you leave me here alone," came in a low tone from Hunston.

Toro barst forth in a fit of hysterical laughter, and sprang forward to raise Hunston up in his arms.

"You're alive—alive!" he cried, wildly. "My poor *camarado*, the sound of your voice warms my heart, and sends the blood through my veins at fever pace. Hurrah—hurrah—hurrah!"

Hunston looked on as one stupefied.

He could not at all comprehend what had taken place.

What he had had was neither more nor less than a species of cataleptic fit, and it had lasted so long, that it had fairly baffled the doctors.

The probability indeed is that he would have passed away in this trance, but for an accident.

That accident was the slipping of Toro's knife in the body of Hunston, in the clumsy efforts to cut away the bag of jewels.

But there was no time for explanation now.

Before Toro could utter another word, the door was burst open, and five or six armed men entered the place.

"See there," cried the first to cross the threshold, "behold him!"

"Down with him."

"Let him pay the penalty for this sacrilege," cried another.

"Death to the villain who does not respect the sanctity of the grave," quoth a fourth, who was the head of the lazaretto, and they made a show of rushing upon the Italian.

"Stand back, if you value your lives!" thundered Toro, plucking up now that he had time for reflection.

"You have proof that I don't respect the dead. Here is ample proof that you don't respect the living."

"Hah!"

"What does he say?"

"I say you do not respect the living," retorted Toro, boldly.

"Audacious scoundrel!" vociferated the head of the lazaretto.

"Do you want proof?" cried Toro; "if so, look there."

Saying which, he pointed to Hunston, and then for the first time they caught sight of that startling spectacle.

Startling, indeed.

The dead alive!

The new-comers stared at Hunston, sitting up in his winding-sheet, and then at Toro, and next at each other.

"Is it possible!" ejaculated the head of the hospital; "does he, then, live?"

"See for yourself," was Toro's reply.

But Hunston set all doubts upon this point at rest, by asking, in dry, husky tones, for a drink.

"My throat is parched and burnt," he said, feebly; "in pity, give me a drink of water."

Some drink was got, and Hunston revived rapidly.

"What is this horrible place?" he asked, with a shudder.

Someone was about to furnish the required information, but the head of the lazaretto interferred.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "Do you, signor," he added to Toro, "explain to your friend that this is the surgery where he has been brought, as he has been so long in a trance that an operation might have been necessary; the shock of learning the truth might be too much for him in his present condition."

Toro approved the idea, and translated it faithfully; but Hunston was by this time fast recovering his presence of mind.

"For a surgery, Toro, it bears a very close resemblance to a mortuary; this," he added, pointing to the linen shroud, "is more like a shroud than a table cloth, and the box I sit in might also be taken for a coffin. Was I not right when I predicted that I should be laid out here?"

"Yes, right and wrong."

"How?"

"It is only a sham death, you see. You have vitality enough in you yet, Hunston, to live the best man out here."

Hunston shook his head.

"I doubt that."

"I feel sure of it; and after all I was right, since you are living now, and have cheated all the doctors."

* * * * *

The restoration to life of the English patient made an extraordinary excitement.

Toro made the best tale he could of his share in the business.

The first question asked was naturally what induced him to break into the mortuary.

He had anticipated this question, and he was prepared with a suitable reply.

"I dreamt that my friend and foster brother was in danger of being buried alive," he said; "the thought of it haunted me, and I no sooner heard of his supposed death than I was determined to see for myself. So I waited until all was quiet, and I crept out—determined at all hazards to learn the truth for myself. You know the rest."

They vowed that this was the most remarkable instance of correct presentiment that had ever come to their knowledge.

The treasurer of the lazaretto, who had a keen eye to his duties—the increasing the funds of the hospital—saw a chance of making capital out of this.

He got a highly-colored version of the story circulated, although, in all conscience, the tale was sufficiently startling as it stood—for the purpose of drawing visitors to the place.

Now visitors were always expected to help the charity by a small donation.

Visitors came in shoals after the first day, and they bled pretty freely, and so it was an excellent accident for the lazaretto.

The result of this was that when Toro and Hunston wished to take their departure, the head doctor, prompted by the treasurer, would not hear of their leaving.

"But we are well now," urged Hunston.

The doctor smiled with a pitying air.

"So you think. But if you think you are well, I have my professional reputation at stake, and I know better."

Toro lost all patience.

His fiery blood was up, and he blurted out:

"Well, signor doctor, well or ill, we will stay no longer."

"Do not be foolish, my good man," said the doctor; "it is not alone for your health that you must stay, but for your interest."

"Interest," said Hunston, "what interest?"

"While you were ill—in that trance, we had some rich English visitors here—very rich."

"What of that?"

"Everything. Why, they were greatly interested when they heard the case mentioned, and they were very liberal to the charity—very liberal. They will no doubt come again when they hear of the extraordinary case, and if they come, no doubt they will be lavish with their money as before."

"So!" exclaimed Toro, violently, "you want to keep us here to make a show of us."

The doctor smiled.

"That's rather a rough way of putting it, but if we did—"

"If—if—"

"Yes," pursued the doctor, coolly; "what then? You cannot aid the funds of the charity upon which you have lived."

"Bah!" cried Toro, furiously; "you want to make us a show for fools to gape at."

Hunston, less impetuous than his comrade, had been thinking the matter over, and hoped to turn it to account.

If these rich English were so very lavish with their wealth, might not a few judicious words bring help from them?

Help for the two interesting invalids themselves, as well as assistance for the hospital funds.

He hastily explained this to Toro,

"When do you expect these English to come here?"

"Perhaps they will come to-day. I will ask."

He called one of the attendants.

"Did the English gentlemen, the Signor Harkaway and his friends, say when they would come?"

"Yes, sir; to-morrow morning."

Toro and Hunston started.

"Did you hear?"

"Yes. Let us make sure; ask him?"

"What name did you say?" demanded Toro, trying to look indifferent.

"Harkaway," was the reply. "Your friend here," he added, indicating Hunston, "is smiling at my pronunciation of the name, perhaps."

"No—no."

"Why did you ask, then? Is the name known to you?"

"Not at all—not at all!" exclaimed Toro, eagerly.

His manner attracted the doctor's attention.

"The name is known to me," said Hunston, who perceived Toro was making a mess of it.

"Hah, I thought so," said the doctor; "he is, as I supposed, a man of note in England?"

"Well, perhaps scarcely a man of note," said Hunston; "but I happened to have heard his name."

"Corpo di Bacco!" ejaculated the Italian, "it matters little whether he be rich or poor, I for one don't want to be shown as a prize pig or

stuffed monkey; and what is more, I mean to go, and go now."

The doctor changed color.

"So you mean to go," he said, giving him a curious look.

"Yes."

"Very good."

He touched the bell as he said this.

A minute after three men appeared upon the threshold.

"This patient has become troubled in the head," he said, significantly, "and he must be kept apart in a padded room."

Toro started.

"A padded room!" he exclaimed.

The doctor smiled.

"You'll soon learn all about it, my poor fellow," he said.

"About what?" demanded Toro, anxiously.

"About your sanity; and also about your doctor. Among other things they will teach you to be obedient to your doctor!"

Toro remarked the meaning smile of the doctor, and he was about to expostulate when suddenly he was seized by two of the attendants, and his arms wrenched back.

The third attendant fastened them by the wrists very dexterously, and then he was powerless to act in his own defense.

Toro blustered and swore, and made a great noise.

The doctor ordered him to be taken to the padded room.

"You'll like to receive your visitors yet."

"Never!" said Toro. "You may do as you like in this infamous den, but I'll see no one."

"How can you help it?"

"I'd make it very unpleasant for you by my explanations."

"Bah! they will know it is but the raving of a madman."

"Not when I relate how generous they were on the first visit, and that I am kept here to work upon their sympathies, and—"

The doctor broke in here impatiently.

"Take him away," he cried; "to the padded room with him."

The order was obeyed, and as he left the doctor said to himself:

"He's right there, that is checkmate. Of course I cannot have them see him—the big-headed fool! The other is more tractable, I suppose."

He thought it best to keep them apart, but Hunston soon persuaded him to the contrary.

"He is very obstinate," said Hunston, "but I could soon bring him to his senses."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure."

"My own opinion is," said the doctor, with a searching glance at Hunston as he spoke, "that the name of the visitors sounded unpleasant to him."

"No—no," interrupted Hunston.

"Well, go to your friend, perhaps you may be able to calm him."

"I'll try."

The doctor called his attendants, and gave orders for Hunston to be sent to the other patient.

When Hunston entered the padded room, he found Toro fastened hand and foot with cords.

He was scowling fearfully.

"Be careful," whispered the latter hurriedly; "they are listening at the door."

And then he said in a loud voice:

"Come—come, old comrade, the doctor only spoke for our own good. Let me persuade you; they are quite frightened with your wild behavior."

Toro grunted.

"Pretend to give way by degrees," whispered Hunston.

"Well, I won't be driven."

"That's it," exclaimed Hunston; "but the good doctor wants you as a favor—"

Signs were exchanged, and Toro appeared to assent in a grumbling manner.

To have changed too suddenly might have aroused suspicions.

And then they heard footsteps retreating along the stone-paved passages.

As the last echo died away in the distance Hunston turned and exclaimed:

"We must escape to-night."

"We will," said Toro.

"To-morrow Harkaway will again cross our path, and then it would be too late."

"Too late, indeed. Escape is the word, and if I can get that cursed doctor's throat in my grip, I will have his life."

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN MR. MOLE TAKES SPIRITS WITHIN AND SEES A SPIRIT WITHOUT.

OF course Mole came in for a vast quantity of badinage from his friends about the marriage and execution.

Mrs. Harkaway, in particular, rebuked him very severely, as also did "little Emily," who, however, soon relented, and asked the tutor a variety of questions concerning his adventures with the brigands.

"Are you not sorry you went on shore there?" she asked. "Only think how much better it would have been if you had stayed on the ship to take care of Mrs. Mole. If you had done so, the brigands would never have had a chance of capturing you."

"My dear Miss Emily," said Mr. Mole, "it will ever be a source of satisfaction to me to remember that I was a prisoner in the hands of those miscreants at the time of that memorable attack upon the house in the wood upon Magic Island."

"But you were out of the way of the fighting?" said little Emily, slyly.

"Out of the way?" iterated Mr. Mole indignantly; "no, I was on the way to give the scoundrels what they so richly deserved."

"Dear me, I did not know that," said Emily.

"Not know it? Goodness me! why, I thought everybody knew what my share in the work was."

"I know," said young Jack, who was present, "that Mr. Mole rendered very great service."

Mr. Mole knew well the chaffing spirit of the family, and had his misgivings about young Jack.

He shot a sharp glance of inquiry, but young Jack returned it with the demurest possible stare, and Mr. Mole was led on to indulge in his constitutional weakness for lying and exaggeration.

"I was left alone for some little time," said Mr. Mole, "and I soon contrived to get free; so I watched the fight in great anxiety, as you may suppose."

"Yes, I should," responded young Jack, dryly.

"I saw one of the brigands coming in my direction, so I waited until he was close by where I was hiding—"

"Hiding?"
"Yes."

"Oh, then, you did hide?"

"For strategic reasons," responded Mr. Mole.

"I see."
"Well, just as the poor man was close by, I pounced out upon him and disarmed him."

"Poor fellow!"
"You will say poor fellow directly," said Mr. Mole; "he was in such a state that I was forced to kill him."

"What?" cried little Emily.
"Or he would have killed me."

"You had no choice, then?"
"None, but I was merciful; I took off his head at a single stroke of his own sword."

At this there was a general chorus of "Goodness gracious!" in which little Emily and young Jack were joined by other voices.

The latter belonged to Dick Harvey and Magog Brand.

"Goodness gracious!"
But the addition to his audience did not in any way dismay Mr. Mole.

He had been indulging to some slight extent, and in his case the old proverb, *in vino veritas*, was exactly reversed.

He never pulled the long bow so hard as when his brain was heated by the fumes of alcohol.

"At a single stroke," he said, planting his right wooden leg firmly down; "and can you wonder at that?"

"Singular to relate, we can," responded Dick.
"You know my reputation as a swordsman in my youth," said Mr. Mole.

"I ought to have heard it," said Dick.

"You know when I was your age, I have faced some of the greatest experts with small arms. You have heard of Angelo, the great fencing master?"

"Yes."
"He, Angelo, the great master, would not face me."

"Very rude of him to turn his back," said Dick.

"Of course, he didn't do that."
"I mean he dared not face me with the sword. He knew I was too much for him."

"I don't wonder at that," said Dick; "you are almost too much for us, too—eh, Mr. Brand?"

"That he is," laughed the little gentleman; "but I say, Mr. Mole, how are those beautiful fair—no, I mean, your splendid dark twins getting on?"

"My children, I confess, are dark," said Mole,

"but then you see, I have one advantage—they do not require washing so much as your pale-faced children, and you know that saves some amount of crying. However, I wish I had a chance of showing you what I could do if my courage was put to the test."

He drew himself up to his full height, and stood not only on his wooden legs, but on his dignity likewise.

Now, strange to relate, as Mr. Mole spoke, he strutted off to the window with an air of lofty patronage just as a deep shadow fell across it.

Next minute, two men passed along, one limping and leaning upon the other.

The limping man looked up and peered into the room through the glass, and he faced Mr. Mole, their eyes divided by the window, but really not twenty inches apart.

Mr. Mole staggered back.
His face was ghastly pale and his lips bloodless.

Stranger than all, he was thoroughly sober in an instant.

"Good Heaven! Mole," ejaculated Dick, "what has happened?"

Mr. Mole made some faint sound, but they could not make out what he said.

Fright had rendered him inarticulate.

"Have you seen a ghost?"

Mole nodded.

"I have," said he, in a hollow voice; "the ghost of the Italian brigand, Toro."

There was a general rush to the door and window, but no signs were to be seen of the two men.

Both had disappeared.

"My opinion is," said Magog Brand, "that the ghosts have been conjured up by the spirits Mr. Mole has taken as refreshers."

And this view was generally adopted, in spite of Mole's protestations, in spite of his white face and staring eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

TORO AND HUNSTON—THE ESCAPE FROM THE LAZARETTO—OUT OF THE WINDOW—A TUSSLE AT THE GATE—A VERY WARM CHASE.

THEY were inclined to laugh at Mr. Mole, and treat the whole matter as a fit of imagination.

This we have seen.

What we have yet to see, however, is how much truth there was in his wild exclamation.

This you may learn by reading what follows.

* * * * *

Toro and Hunston looked about them in that padded room, and mentally reckoned up the chances of escape.

They were meagre.

The door was fast enough.

So fast, indeed, that it would have defied the exertions of an experienced burglar, armed with proper instruments, to demolish it.

There only remained one chance for them—the window.

To this, therefore, they devoted all their attention.

The window was solidly barred.

This was not a very hopeful beginning, but they were not easily discouraged.

The dreaded visit of Jack Harkaway and his party filled them with dismay; and, come what would, they must get clear of the lazaretto before the morrow.

Toro clambered up to the window by mounting upon Hunston's shoulders, and once there, he held on.

"Where does the window look out to?" asked Hunston.

"Can't see yet," replied Toro, tugging at the bars. "I must get my head out first."

"Pull the bars away."

Toro grunted.

"That is more easily said than done. I can't move them."

"Here, take my knife; loosen the mortar in which they are set."

"Good."

He set to work again; and after persevering for some few minutes, out came one of the bars.

"Bravo! Now look," said Hunston, eagerly.

"What do you see?"

"The roof of a low building."

"Which?"

"I scarcely know it; yet stay—"

"Is it slated and slanting, on one floor only?"

"Yes; I know it now. It is the deadhouse, I remember."

"I thought as much," said Hunston. "Tell me what is the drop?"

"Perhaps twelve feet, or perhaps fifteen; not more."

"Good."

"Now a little more patience, a little more work, and then—"

"Hist!" ejaculated Hunston, eagerly.

"What is it?" demanded Toro, in an excited whisper.

"Someone coming."

"In the corridor?"

"Yes."

Toro, without a word, slid down to the floor, and with one of the bars, he made a strong wedge in the crack of the door, which would certainly impede its opening.

Another bar, which was not so thick, he thrust into the key hole, and thus spiked the lock.

"There, that will spoil their curiosity," said he, with a chuckle; "and now to look to the windows."

Hardly were the words uttered, when the door was tried upon the other side.

The key was thrust into the lock, but of course, it could not turn, thanks to the spiking with the iron bar.

After a few moments' fumbling, Toro could hear a voice, in vexation, mutter:

"Why, they have given me the wrong key."

"I don't think so," replied another voice outside.

"This one will not turn. We must get back and see."

And then, to the intense satisfaction of the two occupants of the padded chamber, footsteps were heard retreating along the stone corridor.

Back they got to the window.

A third and fourth bar were speedily out, now that the settings were loose.

And now there was room enough to squeeze through.

While Toro was thus engaged, Hunston was not idle.

He had torn down the leather with which the room was hung, and slit it with his knife into strips.

These he tested in a variety of ways, and once secure enough to trust the weight of his body to, they were fastened to the only bar left in the place.

To complete all this, they had perhaps spent five minutes.

But yet it was time enough for the people to be at the door again.

The door was shaken violently now.

Loud voices were heard in altercation.

"Now we must be quick," said Hunston, excitedly.

"Hush!"

A voice without was heard challenging them.

"Ho! Signor Italiano."

It was the doctor.

"Che cosa, Signor Dottorino?" (What is it, little Mr. Doctor?)

"Ho vesogno" (I want)—began the doctor.

"Basta—basta!" interrupted Toro, with a laugh of derision, "ho useite adesso—adesso." (I have just gone out).

And he wound up with a noisy fit of laughter.

The next moment Toro was out of the window.

"Be careful," exclaimed Hunston, in a whisper.

"All right."

The knocking at the door of the padded room grew louder.

Hunston turned to the window in great anxiety.

Toro was half way down, and the frail rope of strips of leather upon which he trusted, was cracking ominously under his weight.

The hammering upon the door became every instant more alarming.

If they were not quick, there was really some danger of the door being broken in.

Hunston waited only a short time, just enough to see Toro safely landed upon the roof of the dead-house, before he trusted himself to the very primitive ladder.

He clambered through the window just as the doctor shouted:

"Why don't you answer? Do you hear?"

Hunston thrust his head into the chamber, and replied:

"What answer do you wish for? He will not talk."

"He! Who?"

"My friend, the Italian."

The doctor grunted impatiently.

"Tell me if you have done anything to the door."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know well enough. You have made it fast somehow."

"If that's your opinion," retorted Hunston, in an indignant and loud voice, "you are welcome to enjoy it; but I, like my companion here, shall

decline to continue the conversation, since it has taken such an offensive turn."

This was the most judicious speech he had yet made.

It was well timed, too, for Toro was just then beginning to slide down the sloping roof of the dead-house, and as he spoke, Hunston grasped the twisted leather and slid down.

It creaked and strained as he went down, and every moment he expected it to snap asunder.

Great was his relief, therefore, as his feet touched the slated roof below.

At the self-same moment Toro had reached the ground.

A crash was heard above.

The impatient doctor had ordered the door of the padded chamber to be forced, and loud cries above announced that the flight of the two patients or prisoners was already discovered.

As Hunston began his descent from the roof of the dead-house the doctor appeared at the window above, calling and gesticulating in the greatest excitement.

"Stop them!" he shouted, "shut the yard gates! They are two mad patients!"

The gate-keeper ran out, and hearing the alarm, dashed to the gates just as Toro came up at a run.

"Open the gate!" he thundered at the man, "or else—"

The gate-keeper made no reply, but grappled with the fierce Italian.

Toro's blood was up, and he put forth his great strength to grapple with the man, who proved but a mere boy in his clutch.

Seizing the luckless fellow around the waist, he lifted him fairly off his feet, and hurled him violently to the earth.

He lay there quietly enough, never offering to move or stir.

Hunston was by this time at the gate, and dragged at it with all his strength, but in vain; it closed with a spring that held it fast.

"A thousand devils!" cried Toro, "open the gate!"

"I cannot!" replied Hunston.

The startling sound of the alarm bell was now heard, and several men were seen issuing from main entrance of the lazaretto.

Toro rushed at the porter, who lay motionless upon the ground, and with a mighty effort dragged him up on to his feet.

"Now, fool!" he hissed in the man's face, "open the gate, or you haven't another minute to live."

He flourished his long knife in the man's face, as he said this, and half frightened him out of his senses.

There was a murderous expression in the brigand's face as he looked into the frightened man's eyes, and he felt that his life was in jeopardy.

He obeyed Toro with considerable alacrity.

"Close it after me," said the savage Italian, "and stop pursuit, for if we are caught your life shall answer for it."

And so the fugitives passed through the gateway just as eight or ten men flew rather than ran up in hot chase.

Now both Toro and Hunston were fleet of foot, and having a tolerable start, they contrived to render pursuit hopeless, within ten minutes after they had got through the gates of the lazaretto.

"Pew!" groaned Toro, when they drew up to get breath, "that was a narrow escape!"

"Indeed it was," answered his panting comrade; "I thought it was all over with us."

"And I, too, nearly; but we have done them. We bid good-by to the lazaretto, and we laugh at our friend the doctor, in spite of all his threats."

They then made for the town, where they converted some of their valuables into cash, and procured themselves new garments for the purpose of disguise.

CHAPTER V.

THE DANGER INCREASES—HOW HUNSTON WAS DOGGED, AND WHAT CAME OF IT—THE KNIFE—IN THE WOODS—A STARTLER—DOG BITE DOG.

Toro and Hunston were right when they made such frantic efforts to escape from the sight of the Harkaway party.

The hue and cry was already hot enough; they did not wish to add Harkaway's influence to that of the authorities of the lazaretto in hunting them down, and as the two adventurous ruffians were in the lazaretto under assumed names, they would in all probability have escaped the attention of our friends but for the accident of their recognition by Mr. Mole at the window.

Harkaway made his way to the lazaretto, and there having got a full description of the two men who had succeeded in escaping, he could not

have a doubt left in his mind that they must be indeed his old enemies, Hunston and the Italian bravo.

As soon as he was satisfied in his own mind about this, Jack Harkaway went to the police and gave information.

"They are the most vindictive wretches in the world," he said to his old chum, Dick Harvey, "and the sooner they are caged the better, for while they are at large I don't feel that our children are safe."

"Quite right, Jack," said Dick. "As family men we ought to grow prudent some time or other; although, if I tell the honest truth, I don't like putting the police on them."

Jack stared.

"Not like it, Dick?" he exclaimed.

"Well," said Dick, "if I confess my real sentiments, I should like to tackle them again myself. I think it is our duty and our mission to make them 'smell agony,' as the American wags say."

Old Jack fired up at this.

Like an old war-horse, he snorted at the smell of powder, however far off.

But prudence had come upon him with years, and he thought of the peril in which his boy and little Emily had been placed by the machinations of their old enemies.

"If we were alone in the world, Dick," said Jack, "it would be all fair for us, but we must not forget our obligations."

"Of course not."

So the police had the job of hunting down Hunston and Toro handed to them.

From that hour the chase after Hunston and the Italian ruffian grew unpleasantly hot.

Wherever they presented themselves they were beset by huge printed placards, offering rewards for their apprehension.

Moreover, the description was exactly given.

But this was not the worst.

Two days afterwards there appeared a second notice, in which, in the middle of a long placard, in the native type, were two names printed in big capitals of the Roman alphabet.

HUNSTON AND TORO.

"How on earth can they have got at our names?" asked Toro, in amazement.

"There is but one way," replied his companion.

"And that is?"

"Through our old enemy, our bitterest foe in the world."

"Harkaway."

"Of course."

"Malediction on him; accursed be the day that he first saw the light—may—"

"Stop—stop," cried Hunston; "more work and less noise. Just oblige me by thinking your curses; let them be deep rather than loud. The present business is how to get out of this part of the country."

Toro was silenced.

"You are right, Hunston," he said, "although you have a devilish aggravating way of expressing your opinions."

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Hunston, impatiently, "learn to pay less attention to mere words and more to the services rendered. Let us go out of the town as fast as our legs will take us."

"Agreed."

They fixed upon a meeting place about a mile from the city walls, and then they separated, the better to throw the Greek police off the scent.

The appointed meeting place was by a well, or mineral fountain of water.

It was nightfall when Hunston ventured forth from his lurking place, for he was possessed with a strange fancy that he was being watched by a tall, dark man, who had turned up unexpectedly in three different places, where he, Hunston, had been that day.

This watching made Hunston particularly uneasy in his mind, and so he determined to put an end to it.

He walked along to the outskirts of the town, where houses were only at rare intervals, and sauntered by gardens and orange groves, until he thought he had tired out the spy, for so he had, until then, designated the tall, dark man.

"I was wrong after all," he said, half aloud, "for he has left me to my own devices, after all."

And then, as the very words were upon his lips, his tall friend suddenly popped up before him.

Hunston started back, considerably alarmed.

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Hunston," said the dark man in very good English; "I hope I see you well."

Hunston gasped again.

Firstly, at hearing English spoken by the newcomer.

Secondly, at hearing himself addressed by name by a stranger.

"You don't remember me?" pursued the stranger.

Hunston, taken completely off his guard, replied:

"No, I can't say that I do."

"I thought not; but I want you to walk back into the town with me."

Hunston felt just a little uncomfortable now. There was a dash of command in the speaker's tone which told its own tale.

"What do you wish me to go that way for?" he asked, when he could muster up courage.

"Only a freak."

"I don't understand you," began Hunston.

"Don't you?" said the dark man, with a very unpleasant laugh; "oh, you very soon will. Come."

"Gently—gently," said Hunston, who had got back some of his scared senses by this time. "If you will explain your business with me, and tell me who you are, I am willing to make an appointment with you."

The dark man laughed out loud at this.

"My name," he said, "is Piffari. A curious name, is it not? My business," he added, deliberately, "is simply to take you back to the town with me."

"Take me back?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Hunston, you are my prisoner," he answered, in the same calm tone.

Saying which, he clapped Hunston on the shoulder.

"On what charge?"

"Various. Come along, or I shall use force."

Hunston got back his *sang froid* by this time, and he walked back a little way.

He looked forward and backward, to ascertain if there were any witnesses about, while his hand slowly stole into his tail pocket.

He carried a long dagger knife there.

"You are mistaken in addressing me," said Hunston, with an assumed air of offended virtue, "and I warn you that I shall seek redress from our consul."

"Yes, do so, by all means," replied this singular dark man, in the pleasantest way in the world.

"I'm curious to know, sir," answered Hunston, "how you have been led to adopt this very strange course of conduct with me."

"Sir," replied the stranger, with great politeness, "your curiosity on that point will doubtless very soon be satisfied now."

"Very good."

By this time Hunston was gripping the dagger knife nervously in his sound hand, and suddenly he made a dash at his unwelcome companion with the other.

"Ha, Mr. Hunston," said the dark man, catching the mechanical hand by the wrist with the greatest ease, "that is very unkind."

He might have spared his sarcasm, for this was a trap.

Down came the dagger-knife when he least expected it, and with such violence that it pinned him fairly through the body.

The dark man gasped, then quivered from head to foot, and then he gave way at the knees, and sank upon the ground—lifeless.

"That's done," said Hunston, greatly relieved in his mind.

He wiped his knife upon the victim's garments, and then with a final glance about him, he hurried away as fast as his legs would carry him, never looking once back at the murdered man.

* * * * *

"Toro."

"Hunston."

"Here."

"Good."

And the two villains met.

When they came to compare notes, they had a good deal to go through upon both sides.

Toro more than Hunston.

The latter's story, in fact, was soon told.

It was only the story of another tragedy in which he had played the chief part again.

Toro listened silently until Hunston concluded.

A smile of devilish triumph shone in his eyes when Hunston came to the episode of the assassination.

"So perish all our enemies, Hunston," he said, violently, "and now let us get out of this part of the country as fast as we can."

"So say I."

They made for the woods until they came to a

thickly-grown part, where progress became a matter of difficulty.

"This is a capital spot for an ambuscade."

"You are right there, Toro; half a dozen stout fellows could hold this place against a precious big force."

"You are right; but there is little fear of any such danger here."

"Why, have you never read any accounts of the awful atrocities that these Greeks commit?"

"They must be almost as bad as the Italian brigands," said Hunston, slyly.

"Worse—worse!"

"I regret one thing," said Hunston; "we ought to have bought a rifle each and some ammunition."

"They would only have proved a burden to us," replied Toro.

"They would have enabled us to go shooting here; I don't see how we shall get on for food without fire-arms."

"Something is sure to turn up."

Something had.

A loud, commanding voice was heard, and armed men sprang up on all sides.

In less time than it takes to record the fact, they were covered by a dozen rifles.

They staggered back; then held up their hands to show they were unarmed.

The robbers crept on, still pointing their guns at the two victims.

"Move or speak, and you are dead men!" cried a deep voice.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW TORO AND HUNSTON FELL INTO A TRAP—CONDEMNED TO DEATH—A LAST CHANCE.

SEVERAL of the brigands pounced upon Hunston and Toro, and bound them hand and foot.

"Well," said Hunston, when he had recovered from his first surprise, "this is dog bite dog with a vengeance."

"Take us to your leaders," said Toro, presently, to the brigands surrounding him.

"You will not find them more easy to deal with than we are ourselves," said one of the brigands.

"We will take our chance of that," said the Italian.

They were bandaged with handkerchiefs across the eyes, and led along for about three hundred yards.

Then the handkerchiefs were removed.

The two adventurers now found themselves in a clearing in the midst of a thickly-wooded country.

The spot was well chosen.

It was so admirably concealed by its natural position that no one would, by any chance, come across it.

There was a little natural grotto of great beauty facing them, and a miniature waterfall which furnished the brigands with a pure drink.

But neither waterfall nor grotto caught their attention any more than the other beauties of the surrounding scenery.

They only had eyes for the mob of armed men which filled the place.

There seemed to be no end to them.

They lined the open space, and from their steady, silent manner gave the lookers-on the impression that they were a disciplined force, far more so than any of the lawless hosts of a similar character with whom they had been connected in bygone years.

In the center of this striking picture, stood the captain, leaning, as it were, his arm upon his carbine.

He was not a very formidable-looking fellow, although he was certainly a handsome man, and one of rather striking appearance.

"Capitano, your servant," said Hunston, bowing.

"Excellency, my homage to you," said Toro, in his turn.

"Gentlemen," returned the captain, "my best welcome here."

It began well.

So they hoped that they would have no trouble with the captain.

In this, however, they were doomed to disappointment.

They had a great deal of trouble, as we shall see.

"We have been in search of you," said Toro.

"Indeed," returned the captain, smiling incredulously; "then you are no doubt grateful to my people for bringing you to me so soon."

"No and yes," answered the Italian. "Yes, because we were anxious to meet with you. No, because of the rough usage we experienced on the way."

"Indeed, I fear you must blame your own resistance."

"We made none."

"Then consider the extra precautions taken as a compliment to your very bold appearance."

"We hope to prove ourselves bold in more than mere appearance," returned Toro.

"No doubt—no doubt."

The tone of the brigand captain showed that he was bent upon humoring them, and yet it made Hunston vaguely uneasy in his mind.

"Now, gentlemen," resumed the captain, proudly, "allow me to proceed to business, for we have weighty matters before us to go into as soon as your affairs are disposed of."

"By all means," cried Toro.

"Tell me, then," said the brigand captain, "what are your respective positions?"

Toro and Hunston, instead of replying, could only look at each other in rather a puzzled manner.

They could not frame a reply to this question. Hunston, being to man of superior education and tact, found a way out of the difficulty.

"We have no position," he answered. "We have been what you are, and our wish is to join you."

The brigand eyed him sharply.

"Join us?"

"Yes."

"Humph! That is to live on our earnings instead of starving."

"No!" thundered Toro, vehemently, "no!"

"No; our intention is to work, to show you that we can bring as much to the general coffers as the best man among you. We are no idlers."

The captain mused in silence for awhile, and then he said:

"Enough of this. Tell me what ransom you can offer if I spare your lives?"

"Ransom!" echoed Toro; "we haven't a friend in the world."

"Ransom!" exclaimed Hunston, "not a rap."

"Then you know the consequences," said the chief, with a lowering glance.

Hunston was silent.

Toro shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't keep useless men here," said the chief, sternly.

"You will not send us back?"

"No."

"Good, we shall soon show you how we can merit the good thoughts of the best of you."

"No," continued the brigand captain, ignoring the latter speech; "for we cannot trust men back who have been as far as this."

"What mean you?"

"Simply this," returned the captain, in an ugly voice, "that you will be shot at daybreak."

An unpleasant silence succeeded this speech.

"We had better have remained in the town," remarked Hunston; "the police could not have treated us worse."

"Then you had got into a mess there?" demanded the captain.

"Yes."

"How?"

"One of the gendarmes would have detained us, so I killed him."

The brigand captain's face brightened at this, and Toro cheered up.

Hunston had secured the sympathy of the lawless chieftain.

"Why that is as good as a ransom," said the latter; "we can sell you to the police."

This was a staggerer.

A deathblow to their hopes.

And with this the chief haughtily dismissed the subject.

But Hunston was not to be disposed of so easily.

While Toro contented himself with storming and swearing, Hunston's busy brain was at work.

He had got into a terrible mess, but he did not intend giving up without a struggle.

"One word before your excellency goes," he said.

"Can you find the ransom?" demanded the captain.

"No, but—"

"Enough; to-morrow morning at daybreak I shall see you again, for the last time."

"Stay, you shall hear me."

"Shall!"

"Ay, shall," said Hunston, with determination; "if I cannot give you a ransom, I can leave you a legacy."

The brigand chief stopped short at this.

"A legacy?"

"Yes; a legacy of hate."

"Thank you, I have a fair store of it already, and need not your legacy."

"Perhaps," retorted Hunston, promptly; "but

my legacy offers you not hate alone, but a rich booty as well."

The words caught the captain's ears.

"What mean you?" he asked.

"This; in a word, our purpose in joining you was to get your aid to secure a rich countryman of mine."

"An Englishman?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Hard by. Not a league from hence. This man, who is our bitterest enemy, is rolling in wealth. He could buy up your kingdom, and his ransom would fill your pockets for life."

He paused. The captain was evidently interested in the tale.

"Go on."

"This man is a dare-devil, a rash fool that you can lay hands on if you will, for he runs into danger for the simple pleasure of encountering it."

"Indeed; he must be an extraordinary man."

"He is."

"His name?"

"Harkaway."

The captain stared, and started back as though he had received an electric shock.

"What?" ejaculated the brigand, in a voice of thunder; "Harkaway again!"

"You know the name?" said Hunston, in surprise.

"Know it!" reiterated the captain, "it is eternally dinned into my ears. I have heard this Harkaway spoken of as one beside whom Achilles was but a braggart, a second Hercules and an Apollo all rolled into one."

Hunston winced.

To hear his old enemy thus praised was bitter as gall to him.

"You at least need not sound his trumpet," he said, "for he is your sworn foe."

"Now you say too much," retorted the captain, fiercely: "he knows me not."

"Not personally, perhaps, but he is your enemy unseen. He is the sworn exterminator of your trade. He has made his mark in Italy, where a whole band fell before his unceasing efforts at their destruction. In America he made his presence known to others, and here his purpose will be, unless I am greatly mistaken, to hunt you down."

The captain looked in silence, as Hunston proceeded.

The words sank deeply into his mind, and with good reason.

He remembered the visit of that same Harkaway, the redoubtable Englishman, to a neighboring mountain, whither he had been decoyed under pretext of hearing a famous echo, and how Harkaway had fought the captain, defeated him, and given him up to justice.

The brigand captain had not forgotten how several of the brigand band had been treated, nor that Harkaway had brought them to their doom in a way that the slow-going authorities could never have done alone and unaided.

The brigand chief brooded long and silently over this.

Meanwhile, both Toro and Hunston passed a precious unpleasant time of it.

They were placed under a strong guard, and treated as men under sentence of death.

At daybreak they were to die.

* * * * *

Towards three o'clock in the morning both Toro and Hunston dozed off.

They had been sleeping perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes, when Hunston was aroused by a hand being placed upon his shoulder.

"Awake!"

The prisoner started up with a cry of alarm.

"So soon? The day has not dawned yet."

"Do you wish to see a priest?"

The prisoner shuddered at these ominous words.

"No."

"Will your comrade?"

"Ask him."

The other prisoner was aroused, but he also declined the aid of priest or pastor.

"I have lived a brave man," said the Italian, "and I shall show you Greeks how a brave man can die. I have faced death too often to be afraid of it, whenever and wherever it comes. Only I would sooner have died with a sword and rifle in my hand."

"If you want no priestly aid," said the man, "you can sleep again for twenty minutes. By that time the firing party will be called."

With this he left them.

As soon as he was out of hearing, the two prisoners carried on a brief conversation in English.

The only tongue to which they could safely trust here.

"What shall we do, Toro?"

"Do! What is there to do? Stand up and receive as many bullets as possible, so as not to writhe long in the agonies of death."

"Do you give up, then?"

"What else is there to do?"

"One thing."

"What is it?"

"Make a rush for it."

"To what end?"

"To escape."

"Bah! and to be shot down or cut piecemeal before we got a dozen yards."

"Well," quoth Hunston, "what of that? It would be more satisfactory to die in harness, than shot down like dogs. Besides, poor as the chance is, surely there is a chance."

Toro reflected.

"You are right. We can only die," he added, with an air of determination. "Let us try it."

"Gently then; there is no need to spoil our chances by imprudence, after all."

"True."

"And now that we are agreed upon that, Toro," added Hunston, "let us settle what next to do when we are clean away—if—"

"Ah, 'if'—a very big 'if.' I think it is a waste of breath to sketch out anything further. We shall not escape."

"You're a Job's comforter," retorted Hunston, "but I prefer taking the hopeful side of every question. If we escape, make for the Lazaretto."

"Why, in the name of the fiend, there?" cried Toro.

"Not to stop there. Get past there to the sea, and try to get on board some ship as a stowaway. For between the *gens d'armes* and the brigands here, we shall never be safe in this cursed place."

"You are right," said Toro; "when shall we make the attempt?"

"Now."

They arose quietly to their feet, and Hunston led the way upon tip-toe for eight or ten yards, when suddenly they found themselves confronted by a dark, shadowy form.

"Where are you going?" asked a cold, calm voice, in the Italian language.

They had not a word to reply.

So suddenly had the speaker appeared, that they were taken completely aback.

"I want a word or two with you. You Englishman, I mean."

They recognized now the voice of the brigand captain.

"Speak, captain," said Hunston, recovering himself.

"Is it true that Harkaway, the Englishman, is near this spot?"

"Yes."

"You swear?"

"I swear."

"And would you still pledge yourself, if death by torture were to be the penalty for the discovery of your falsehood?"

"Under any circumstances I would swear it by any oath you could prescribe," returned Hunston, boldly, "for it is true. Harkaway, the enemy of brigands, is near us."

"Admitting that, could you help me to the capture of this hero, Harkaway?"

"I could."

"How?"

"Many ways."

"One will suffice," returned the brigand captain, coldly; "I don't like those who protest too much."

"One, then, is a means of decoying Harkaway alone into your power."

"Ha!"

"What think you of it?"

"Very good, if the plan be fair. How would you set to work?"

"Simply by writing a letter."

"This Harkaway is a man of more than ordinary discernment," returned the brigand captain; "your letter would have to be something cunning indeed to entrap him after that adventure which cost the lives of so many of our best followers, and of a gallant chief among the number."

"Let me have paper and pen and ink or pencil, and I will draw up a letter at once and give you the whole scheme."

"Have you thought it out?"

"I am now thinking it out," was the reply.

This answer caught the brigand's attention.

The ready wit it promised gave him hope, and secured his interest in the scheme.

He called out to some of his followers the necessary instructions.

While they were gone Hunston turned to Toro, and said:

"Old comrade and companion of many a danger, you saved my life recently; I shall return the obligation now, I think."

"I hope so, Hunston," returned the Italian.

Hunston then proceeded to sketch out the following letter:

"TO MR. JOHN HARKAWAY:

"If you care to see once more in life a wretched man, who in bygone years was known to you as Hunston, come at once with the bearer of this note, whom you may implicitly trust. The writer's dying wish is to expiate as far as may be the crimes of his past days, the more especially those with which you have been directly associated. It is needless to point out that the roads are infested with brigands, that it would be in the highest degree imprudent to come unarmed or unaccompanied by a good, strong escort. The unhappy man who pens these lines with such infinite pains has but recently escaped from the hospital of the Lazaretto, and in his flight has sustained the severe injuries which preclude all possibility of his recovery. The end is merely a question of days—perhaps only of hours."

When finished, he scanned it through, and then apparently satisfied with it himself, he handed it to the captain of the brigands.

He made a hurried translation of it into Italian, and then in silence awaited his comments on it.

The captain said nothing; but Toro was full of critical remarks.

"It will excite suspicion at once," said he, "to try on the decoy dodge."

"The invitation to bring assistance with him will put him off the scent—"

"And put us off the chance, too," said Toro, "if he should do so."

"If your letter brings him far enough out of the town, I know how to act," said the captain.

"Nothing is easier," said Hunston, "provided that we can find a messenger trusty and courageous."

"We have plenty of men ready to accept the risk," returned the captain; "brave men are not scarce amongst my followers."

"Doubtless."

"What do you say to the scheme?" demanded Toro of the captain,

"I think it practicable," was the reply.

"And are you willing to try it?"

"Yes."

Toro's countenance brightened visibly at this.

"Let us have it carried out without loss of time, capitano," said he, eagerly, "for I long to see our old enemy laid by the heels. Once let me see him at my feet, and I can die contented."

The brigand captain was silent for awhile.

He reckoned up his plans, and the chances of success.

And then he gave out his decision.

"At dusk to-morrow the attempt shall be made," he said, "and if successful, not only shall you have your lives, but a rich share of the booty we may make by it, and, if you desire it, a post of trust for each of you in my band."

The brigand captain then, without another word, left Toro and Hunston in charge of three of his band, each armed with sword and musket.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE HIGHWAY—THE LOVERS AND THE BRIGANDS—AN ADVENTURE WITH A RICH BISHOP.

A LITTLE later in the morning, the captain of the brigands came to Toro and Hunston with a fresh proposal.

"I am about to give you a proof of my confidence in you," he said.

"Captain," returned Hunston, promptly, "you shall find that your confidence is not unmerited."

"I hope so."

Then he summoned the whole band by bugle call, and when they were assembled to the number, perhaps, of sixty odd men, he made the following short address:

"These two men here," he said, "are comrades; they come to join us. Let the oath of allegiance be administered to them, and then we must forget that they were ever with us other than as friends."

The oaths were then taken by Hunston and Toro.

The wording of the oaths was of too horrible a nature to be repeated here, nor, indeed, is its repetition at all necessary.

Suffice it to say that the ceremony was not altogether wanting in solemnity, and that all alike appeared to be impressed with it.

When it was done, the captain sent the men upon their respective errands again, while he resumed his conversation with the new members of his band.

At this point there came up a brigand in hot haste with news.

This was a scout.

He had discovered that a wealthy prelate was going to travel in his carriage, very poorly attended, through the very heart of the brigand's scene of action.

"The bishop counts upon the sanctity of his office for protection," said one of the brigands.

"He shall have more blows than protection from me," said the captain; "I owe him a turn."

"Pardon me, captain," said one of the brigands, "you know that it will make the superstitious folks about here very bad indeed against us if anything happened to a bishop."

"I can't help that," said the brigand captain shortly; "if his lordship will insist upon travelling over our property, he must pay toll just as well as any ordinary priest or layman, and he shall pay smartly for it, too, if I have any luck to-day."

The expedition was got up by three men.

The captain in the first place.

Next were Hunston and Toro.

The purpose of this the reader has already discovered.

It was simply to test them before they ventured upon a matter of greater moment.

He procured them disguises, and then they set out for a favorite spot upon the high road, along which my lord bishop was pretty sure to pass.

Here they waited for about an hour, when a scout, at a considerable distance from the spot, blew them a signal.

"His lordship is on the way," said the captain to his new recruits; "stand close and take the word from me."

"Good."

"I will see to the reverend gentleman alone; he is not very formidable."

Barely were the words uttered, when they heard the jingle of bells, and a carriage appeared in sight.

"Hide you away," said the captain, hurriedly.

They obeyed, and the carriage rolled up to where the brigand chief sat, hat in hand, upon the bank.

As the pair of ponies came trotting up to the spot, the brigand arose and seized the bridles with a sudden firmness that stopped them in their trot, and sent them rearing back almost upon their haunches.

"Charity, monsignore—charity," said the brigand, in a regular medicant's drawl.

"Audacious scoundrel!" ejaculated the reverend gentleman.

"Charity, my lord," repeated the brigand, as before.

"Let loose the heads of the horses."

"Alms, my lord bishop, for a poor miserable sinner."

"There, then," said the bishop, testily; "take my blessing, and stand aside."

"Thanks, holy father," said the brigand, "a poor man's best wishes for your goodness, but I would fain have solid charity with them."

"I have nothing."

"Indeed you have."

"Insolent!"

The brigand chief, in the coolest manner possible, left the ponies' heads, and came to the carriage window, where he thrust his head in.

"Could your lordship not manage me a few hundred francs?"

"A few hundred?" quoth the bishop, aghast.

"A thousand," said the brigand, coolly, "if possible."

"Poor wretch!" said his lordship; "he's mad."

"Not very, father," responded the brigand; "only my head has been fired with the tales of your almost fabulous wealth, which appears hard, whilst I and the likes of me are hungry."

"It is false," answered the bishop, promptly; "I have no wealth. Never a penny of my own have I."

"Excuse me, my lord," said the robber, "but that must be your purse, there, that I see beside you."

So saying, he stretched forth his hand and took up a weighty velvet sack of money that was held together by a thick silken cord.

It jingled with a rich metallic sound that spoke of gold.

Put before he could get it through the window the bishop had produced a long-barrelled pistol from under his robe, and dealt him such a sharp rap upon the knuckles that the bag fell to the bottom of the carriage.

Then he lunged sharply out, and thrust the pistol muzzle into the robber's face.

"You are mistaken," he said, with great calmness. "That is a bag of medals and holy relics."

"So I perceive, now," said the brigand, coolly. "I have lost my spectacles, and you would never believe how near-sighted I am."

"Ugh!" grunted the prelate, "accept my blessing alone this time, and make way."

The brigand withdrew and made a profound obeisance.

"My lord, I shall remember you in my prayers."

"Pray don't," retorted the prelate, hurriedly.

And with this the ponies were whipped up, and the little carriage rolled off, the bishop's admirable coolness having saved his money bag.

Toro and Hunston crept out of their hiding-place.

"Well," said the brigand captain, laughing heartily at his own failure, "what do you think of that reverend gentleman?"

"Wonderful!"

"Great courage."

"And presence of mind."

"Both," said the brigand. "His coolness almost lost me mine."

"Hark!"

"What's that?"

"A bugle."

"A signal from Livoni the scout."

The signal was heard again, and then the brigand captain made his reply.

The counter-signal was heard in the course of three minutes, and the captain said:

"Two persons are coming, it would appear, by the signal."

He proved to be correct, too, for in the space of a few moments up came a couple in sight.

"A brace of lovers spooning," suggested Hunston.

He was not far out, for there soon appeared a youth and a girl, leaning lovingly upon each other, and evidently so engrossed by each other that they had never a thought for anything else in the world.

But there was a startler in reserve for them.

Just as they got by the brigands, they popped out of their hiding-places and seized them.

The girl shrieked, and hid her face in her hands.

The young fellow turned upon his assailants, and snatching a gun from the hands of one of the brigands, felled the man to the earth with the butt end.

The next moment the gun was pointed in a direct line to the brigand's captain's head.

But before the trigger could be pulled, Toro threw his huge carcass upon him, and held the young Greek as though he had been in the hug of a bear.

"It is useless to resist," said the captain, as the young man was disarmed and held fast, "please oblige us with all the valuables you have handy."

"We have nothing, sir," replied the trembling girl, "nothing, indeed, sir."

"O-ho!" quoth Toro, who was busily engaged in turning out the lover's pockets, "what is this?"

"Yes," said the young Greek, with a bitter smile, "it is my money, my fortune—two lire. Take it, my gallant friends, and I can go without my dinner."

"Twill do you good."

"That's kind."

Meanwhile, the brigand chief had turned out the maiden's pockets, and lighted upon nothing more valuable than a letter.

"Who's this from?" said the brigand captain, laughing; "our young swain here?"

"No, indeed, sir," answered the trembling girl. "It is an answer to Mr. Mole's note from the contessa."

Hunston pricked up his ears at this.

"A letter from whom?"

"The Contessa Maraviglia," said the girl.

"To whom?"

"To his excellency, Mr. Isaac Mole, sir."

Toro and Hunston exchanged significant glances.

"Do you hear that?"

"I do."

They spoke in English, and signed to the captain to be on his guard while they pursued their questions further.

"Mr. Mole is your master, then?" said Hunston.

"No, sir," returned the girl, "but he is my master's friend."

"Who is your master?"

The girl stared.

"Everybody knows my master," she said; "everybody in this part of the country."

"Perhaps I am an exception," said Hunston; "if you will only say what his name is."

"He is the great English milord, the millionaire, and English prince, Monseigneur Harkaway."

In spite of themselves, the three robbers stared again.

It was certainly an extraordinary coincidence.

"Harkaway?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are taking a letter from the Contessa Maraviglia to Mr. Mole?"

"Yes, sir."

"To—to where?"

"To our villa."

"Why, I always understood that the English Milord Harkaway lived in the great hotel."

"Did do so, sir. But within the past few days only he has taken the Villa Del Popola for his and his friends' occupation."

"The Villa Del Popolo?"

Just then, Hunston perceived something fall from the girl's side, and he hastened to secure it.

It was a key.

In her fright she did not perceive her loss.

"Well—well," said the captain, after coming to a quiet understanding with the two new recruits by signs that were unperceived by the lover prisoners, "we shall not impose any very serious penalty upon you, nor shall we detain you long."

The girl began to offer thanks at such an easy escape.

"The fine you have to pay," resumed the chief of the brigands, with a merry and mischievous look in his eye, "is a kiss to each of us."

The girl got very red in the face, and declared she would never consent to this.

"Oh, yes, you will," answered the chief, with a grin.

"Never," protested the girl, "never—never!"

"You would sooner die first?" said the brigand, with a sham serious look.

"Yes."

"Of course. Well, we can accommodate you even there, if you wish it."

"Oh, sir."

"Oh, yes, we can kill you if you prefer it."

The girl, finding them very yielding and easy so far, had thought that they would never dare offer her violence.

But their words now filled her with alarm.

The blushes which the brigand's audacious proposal had called up into her cheek faded away and left her as white as a sheet.

As for her swain he had not a word to say for himself.

"Well, we must waste no more time," said the brigand captain, drawing a long stiletto from his girdle, and testing its edge with his thumb; "it's in very good condition, and you'll be out of the world almost without pain."

The girl closed her eyes, and looked ready for fainting.

"I can predict, captain," said Toro, "that she will alter her mind now."

"How?" ejaculated the captain, in affected surprise; "impossible!"

"I'll go further," said Toro; "I'll even wager that not only will the young lady relent, but that she will volunteer to give us each a chaste salute herself, of her own free will."

"What say you, young lady?" asked Hunston.

"Come, decide."

"Oh, sir!"

And as she faltered she shrank back affrightedly.

"You see," said the captain, tucking up his sleeves, "she would rather die."

This business-like preparation put the poor girl in a regular fever.

"Oh, Alecco!" she faltered, while her eyes dropped to the ground. "What must I do?"

"You have no choice," was the lover's reply.

"Pardon me," said Toro, "there is a choice—death, or a kiss."

The girl wrung her hands, and looked the picture of embarrassment.

"Ah, well," said the captain, tucking up his sleeves to the elbow, and flourishing the stiletto, "that's all, I suppose. Now for it."

He made a step forward and seized the girl by the wrist.

She shut her eyes and gave a faint scream.

"Oh, sir—oh, sir!" she faltered, "pray let me kiss you!"

"You shall not ask twice, fair one," said the brigand.

He held his face forward ready for the ceremony, and she, timidly advancing her lips, just touched his cheek with them.

"I hardly felt it," said he, roughly; "this is the way."

So saying, he seized her in his arms, and gave her a kiss that echoed again, and made her lover turn livid with rage.

It was not safe he thought, to threaten; but mentally he vowed vengeance.

"Now my turn," said Toro.

He didn't wait for her timid salute, but hugging the girl in his big arms, he stole a dozen kisses.

"Beast!" cried the girl, and she boxed his ears with great energy.

Hunston would not press for his share of the booty, and so the lovers were released, and they made off as fast as their legs would carry them, with a final word of warning from the brigand captain ringing in their ears.

"Savages!" cried the girl.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the robbers.

* * * * *

"This key," said the brigand captain, taking it from Hunston, "is, no doubt, the key of the house, or, at least, of some room there; and it may make our future operations easier than they would otherwise be."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONTESSA'S LETTER TO MR. MOLE—ON PLEASURE BENT—THE MENDICANT FRIAR—MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS—HOUSE-BREAKING.

WHEN Mrs. Harkaway's maid returned to the villa, she got scolded for being so long upon an errand of some importance with which she had been trusted.

Thereupon, she was prepared with twenty excuses, all of which were anything but the truth.

The words of warning which the brigand had called after her had not been without their due effect.

"She had been detained," she said, "by the Contessa Maraviglia for the letter which she brought back to Mr. Mole."

The letter was an invitation to a grand ball which was to be given by the Contessa at the Palazzo Maraviglia, and to which the Harkaways were going.

Dick Harvey had been at work in this business, and had made the contessa believe indirectly that Mr. Mole was a most graceful dancer, and that it would be a most eternal shame for a bal masque to take place in the neighborhood without it being graced by his—Mole's—presence.

The result was that during lunch Mr. Mole received from the maid the following singular effusion:

"Al Illustrissimo Signor Mole," which, being translated, means: "To the illustrious Mr. Mole."

"Halloo!" said the tutor, looking around him, and dropping his eye upon Dick, "who is this from?"

"From the Contessa Maraviglia," replied the girl.

Mr. Mole gave her a piercing glance.

The contessa's letter was a sort of puzzle to poor old Mole.

"The Contessa Maraviglia begs the honor of the Signor Mole's company on the 16th instant. She can accept no refusal, as the fete is specially organized in honor of Signor Mole, whose rare excellence in the poetry of motion has elevated dancing into an art."

Isaac Mole read and re-read this singular letter, until he grew more and more fogged.

He thought that the contessa had failed to express herself clearly in English on account of her imperfect knowledge of our language; but he was soon corrected in this impression.

The lady in question, it transpired, was English.

So poor Mole did what he thought best under the circumstances, and that was to consult with Dick Harvey.

"Dear me!" echoed Dick, innocently; "why, you have made an impression here, Mr. Mole."

"Do you think so?" said Mole, doubtfully.

"Beyond question. This contessa is smitten, sir, with your attractions; but I can assist you here."

"You can?"

"Of course."

"Thank you, my dear Harvey, thank you," replied Mr. Mole, eagerly.

"Yes; I can let the contessa know that there is no hope for her."

Isaac Mole's vanity was tickled at this.

"Don't you think it would be cruel to undeceive her?"

"Cruel, sir!" said Dick, with a severe air, "no, sir; I don't. It is my duty to tell her all."

Mr. Mole looked alarmed.

"What do you mean?"

"That you are a married man."

"I say, I say—"

"Yes, sir; very much married," pursued Dick, relentlessly; "that you have had three wives, and were nearly taking a fourth."

"Don't, Dick."

"All more or less black."

"Dick—Dick!"

"However, there is no help for it; you will have to go to this ball."

"Never."

"You will, though. The contessa has heard of your fame in the ball-room—"

"What?"

"In bygone years, no doubt—and she does not know of the little matters which have happened since to spoil your activity, if not your grace."

As he alluded to the "little matters," he glanced at Mr. Mole's wooden legs.

Mr. Mole thought it over, and then he read through the letter again.

"You are right, Harvey," he said, with an air of determination; "and my mind's made up."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, for your absence would be sadly missed at the ball."

"You misunderstand me, Harvey; I shall not go."

Dick looked frightened.

"Don't say that, Mr. Mole, I beg, don't; it would be dangerous."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that this lady is English by birth, but she has lived in the land of the Borgias, where they yet know how to use poison."

"Harvey?"

"And if her love was slighted, she might recollect it."

Mr. Mole looked precious uncomfortable.

"It is really very embarrassing, Harvey," said he; "my personal attractions are likely to get me into trouble."

And yet, in spite of his embarrassment, Mr. Mole was not altogether displeased at the fancy.

He strutted up and down, showing the fall in his back to the best advantage, and was very evidently conscious that he was rather a fine man.

"Yes, sir," said Harvey, with great gravity; "your fatal beauty is likely to lead you into a mess."

At the words "fatal beauty," Mr. Mole made a grimace.

It was rather a strong dose for even him to swallow.

"Draw it mild, Harvey," said he, "pray draw it mild."

Dick shook his head with great seriousness.

"Don't you be deceived, Mr. Mole," said he; "use the greatest care, for this poor countess is to be pitied. Her love is likely to turn to violent hate if she finds herself slighted—the poniard or the poisoned chalice may yet be called to play a part in your career."

Mr. Mole turned pale.

Yet he tried to laugh.

A hollow, ghastly laugh it was, too, that told how he felt more plainly than words could have done.

"Don't, Harvey; don't, I beg!" he said in faltering tones; "it sounds like some dreadful thing one sees upon the stage."

"In all these southern countries, you know, Mr. Mole, a man's life isn't worth much."

"Harvey?"

"A hired assassin or bravo will cut a throat or stab a man in the back for a few francs."

"Oh!"

"I should advise you not to keep out after dark—and avoid dark corners. These people can poison you, too, with a bouquet or a jewel. Accept a flower or a nosegay, but don't smell it."

"Harvey."

"Sir?"

"Is it your wish to make me uncomfortable?"

"How can you think it?"

"Do you wish me to dream all night, and disturb Mrs. Mole, and not to get a wink of sleep?"

"Certainly not; that's why I am giving you advice; but pray understand the contessa thinks you are a single man."

"Good gracious me; it is very unpleasant to have a contessa in love with one."

"I don't know that; most men wouldn't say so. There are, I'll be bound, forty men within a mile of this house who would give their ears to have received such a letter."

Mr. Mole smiled—a self-satisfied, complacent smile.

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

Mole lifted his collar and shot his cuffs over his hands, as he stumped across the room, and looked into a glass.

"Well—well, Harvey, I suppose I must go to the ball; but you will bear me witness that I only go for reasons of prudence, and that I am not led away by any silly reasons of vanity?"

"Of course," returned Dick, gravely.

"Besides, I go disguised."

"Certainly."

"And what disguise would you recommend?"

"Why, that is a matter for reflection," said Dick. "I should think that you ought almost to keep up the character."

"The character!" said Mole. "What character?"

"A Terpsichorean personage," replied Dick, with the air of one discussing a grave problem. "Say, for instance, a ballet girl."

Mr. Mole gasped.

"No—no; not a ballet girl."

"A fairy queen, then."

"Don't, Dick; don't, I beg."

"Or, if you object to the costume of the gentler sex, what do you say to the spangles and wand of a harlequin?"

"Do you really think that such a costume would become me?"

"Do I think?" iterated Dick. "Do I know? Of course it would become you. You will look the part to the life; it wants a figure to show off such a dress and to be shown off by it."

"But what about my—my wooden legs, Dick?"

"Oh, I'll provide you with cork ones; and here they are," said Harvey, producing a pair.

And so it was settled.

Mr. Mole was to go to the ball, and his disguise was to be the well-worn spangles and colors of Harlequin.

Harvey himself chose a clown's costume, and carried over his shoulder Mole's wooden legs, in case anything happened to the cork ones he was walking on for the first time.

Harkaway was to go as a knight of old.

Magog Brand selected the character of Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame.

Jefferson selected the character of Julius Caesar, a costume which his fine, stalwart form set off to considerable advantage.

Mrs. Harkaway was to go as Diana, the huntress, and Mrs. Harvey made Marie Stuart her choice.

Little Emily and Paquita went in dresses of Charles the Second period.

These young ladies were escorted by young Jack and Harry Girdwood, who were richly habited as young Venetian nobles of the sixteenth century.

As they passed through the garden door a man stood in their path.

He wore a long serge gown, with a cowl, like a mendicant monk, and as they approached he put out his open hand for alms.

"Bother the beggars!" said Mr. Mole, tartly.

The monk shrank back into his cowl, and stood aside while the party went by.

The garden door was held by the maid servant while they passed on, and when they were out of hearing, she dropped a small silver coin into the mendicant friar's hand.

"There," she said, "I can spare you something, father; although those rich English cannot or will not, the heretics and Pagans!"

The friar, who was seemingly an aged man, muttered his thanks, as the girl retired and closed the door, locking it behind her.

No sooner was the door closed, than the mendicant monk whistled a low but very distinct note, and lo! two men appeared upon the scene.

It looked as though they had just come up trapdoors in the earth, so suddenly did they show in sight.

"Captain Mathias," said the disguised monk to the first who came up, "I have learnt all we wish to know."

"You have!" ejaculated, not the man addressed by the mendicant monk, but the other. "Out with it, then."

"Still your impatience, Toro, if you can."

"Bah!"

"Well then, learn that Mole goes as—"

"Bother Mole!" interrupted Toro, harshly.

"How does our great foe go?"

"Harkaway?"

"Yes."

"As an English knight of old."

"It shall be my task," said Toro, "to keep up his character, and give it a realistic look by a hand to hand fight."

"Don't be rash," said the mendicant friar, "or you may chance to be beaten."

"I can risk my life on it."

"You have—you do; every hour that you live here imperils it. Did you see the party go?"

"I did," said Mathias.

The latter was no other than the captain of the brigands.

Already they were upon a footing of equality, for the two adventurers had had opportunities, which they had not failed to seize.

They had courage, ready wit, presence of mind, boldness, daring, and cunning, and so it fell out, that they who had made the acquaintance of the brigand's gang under such very unpleasant auspices, became two of the principal members of it within a few days.

But to resume.

"Tell me, Hunston," said Toro, "does Jefferson go to the ball?"

"Yes."

"How disguised?"

"Julius Cæsar."

The Italian said nothing, but his lips moved, and his lowering brow was as expressive as words could be to his old comrade.

It boded ill for Jefferson.

They had met in fair fight, and he, Toro, had been defeated.

That defeat was bitter as gall to him.

He would be avenged.

And if he could not cope with the doughty Anglo-American, then let him look to it.

What strength and skill failed to achieve, the assassin's knife would accomplish.

"Did you see the girl that attended him to the gate?" demanded the mendicant friar, or Hunston, as it would be better to call him, since there is no further need of concealment.

"I did."

"And recognized her, Mathias?" he asked of the brigand captain.

"Yes; it is the pretty wench we stopped with her lover, the coy Marietta."

"Now that they are well off, we may as well set to work," said Hunston.

"Good."

Hunston threw back his friar's cowl and produced a key.

"They have had many a good hunt for this," he said, with his old sinister laugh.

"I dare say."

"It was a lucky thing that the dainty little Marietta dropped it."

"Yes, it makes matters much easier for us to begin with."

The door yielded to the touch of the sham mendicant friar, and the three worthies entered the grounds.

Silently they stepped across a grass-plot, keeping a thick shrubbery between them and the house as far as they could, when just as they gained the shelter of the trellised verandah, a dog within set up a most alarming noise.

The three robbers exchanged uneasy glances.

"Curse the beast!" muttered Mathias, the captain; "he will ruin us."

Toro got ready his long knife and looked about.

But the dog was out of sight.

A lucky thing it was, too, for our old friend, little Mike, for a touch with that ugly instrument would soon have stopped his singing.

Now just above the veranda was a half-opened window, and into this Mathias peered anxiously.

No signs of Mike.

A voice was heard now calling to the faithful guardian of the house to be silent, but Mike refused emphatically to be comforted; thereupon, the person very imprudently called the dog to her and tied him up.

This did not quiet him.

So the person in question tripped down the garden to see if there was really any reason for the dog's singular behavior.

In passing down the path she went so close to the veranda, that the skirts of her dress actually brushed aside the creeping plants which garnished the trellis work.

"Snarling, barking little beast!" quoth Marietta to herself, "and all about nothing; I wish they would lose him."

But when she got to the bottom of the garden and discovered the garden door open, she altered her tone.

"How very silly of me to leave the door unlocked," she said to herself. "Poor little fellow, poor Mike, I'm coming, good dog. He heard

someone, I suppose. Good gracious, what's that? I thought I saw something move there. I'm getting as nervous as a cat ever since those men stopped us and made me kiss them, the beasts. Ugh! how I loathe them, although there was one of them that was really not very bad-looking. I wonder where that poor old friar went to; what was that? Oh, how nervous I feel. I wish that they had left me someone in the house besides that old deaf Costantino; he's nice company, truly, for a girl. Bother the dog, what a noise he is kicking up."

And chattering thus, Marietta re-entered the house.

Meanwhile, Mathias had clambered up the iron balcony, and pushing open the glass door, or rather window, he entered the room.

It was the dining-room, and the remnants of a very sumptuous repast were yet upon the table.

"I'll just take a glass of wine," he said.

He did, too.

He took several glasses of wine, and then, as the fumes of the good liquor mounted to his brain, he grew generous, and he lowered a bottle out of the window to his two comrades beneath.

Toro grasped it, and sucked down a good half of it before it left his lips.

Then Hunston finished it off at a draught.

When Mathias had regaled himself, he made a move to the door.

There was no one about.

Not a sound.

Now was his time.

His object was to explore the house, and ascertain in what particular part of it the cash, the jewels and the plate were kept.

When they had secured these, they could content themselves for the present, at least.

Firstly, therefore, he tied up the silver spoons and knives and forks from the dinner table in a napkin, and dropped the bundle into Toro's hat below.

Then he crept back through the room into the passage.

This done, he waited for awhile to listen, and assuring himself that the coast was clear, he crept up.

On the next landing there were seven doors.

Six were shut, so he peeped into the seventh room, and just then he heard a noise below.

Someone coming upstairs.

What could he do?

He stole back to the stairs and listened.

It was Marietta.

It was really a most embarrassing job now, for there was no retreat, so he crept upon tip-toe into the room of which the door stood ajar.

It was a bedroom, dimly lighted by an oil lamp.

A cursory glance showed him that his room had only been lately vacated, and that one or more of the ladies had been dressing here for the ball.

Within a few feet of the door was a looking-glass let into the wall as a panel, and reaching from floor to ceiling.

Mathias listened in great anxiety for the footsteps on the stairs, and every moment they sounded nearer and nearer.

"I hope she will not come in here," thought the robber, "else I shall have to make her sure."

He showed how he meant to "make her sure" by toying with the hilt of his dagger.

Mathias crouched down, and crept under the bed, just in time, as the pert young lady skipped into the room.

Her first care was to turn up the lamp, and by its light she looked about her.

"I think they might have taken me to the ball with them," she said, saucily shaking her curls off her face. "I should have looked better than some of them, I'll be bound. I'm dead beat with fatigue. I've had all the work dressing them, and they are to get all the fun."

She was silent for some few minutes, and Mathias grew anxious.

What could be going forward?

He would vastly like to know.

Unable to control his curiosity, he peeped out, and then he saw pretty Marietta's portrait in the long looking-glass panel.

She looked prettier than ever now, for, shocking to relate, the young lady was undressing.

Mathias was not to say a bashful man, so he did not draw back.

On the contrary, he stared with all his eyes.

Pretty Marietta little thought, as she stood before the glass, that such a desperate villain was watching every movement.

Wholly unconscious that she was watched by the vile brigand chief, she walked up and down before the glass, shooting admiring glances at

herself over her white and well-rounded shoulders.

"Dress, and rank, and money do wonders," she said. "Why are we not all equal? I'm as good as the best of them, I'm sure, and much better-looking."

With this mixture of feminine vanity and republican sentiments she bustled about, putting the room a bit in order.

Now her first job was to put away several dresses.

The first of these was a short Spanish skirt of pink satin, with deep black lace flounces.

"I wonder how I should look in this?" she murmured.

She held up the dress beside her, to test the color against her complexion.

"Beautiful!"

Beautiful; yes, this was her frank opinion, and, really, we are by no means sure but that her own estimate was very near the mark.

On went the dress.

She strutted up and down, and then, when she had feasted her eyes enough upon her own loveliness, she plaited her hair, and, twisting it up into a rich knot behind, she stuck a high comb into it, and fastened the thick lace veil about her.

Mathias watched it all.

He gloated over that pretty little picture, and, shameless rascal! chuckled to think how little she suspected his presence.

"There," said she, folding the veil about her head with the most coquettish manner, "if I don't look the prettiest senorita alive, why, call me—call me anything odious—yes, even an Englishwoman—ha-ha-ha! How that would please my mistress!"

And then she figured about before the glass, and capered through a Spanish bolero, with considerable grace and dexterity, while she sang an impromptu verse to an old air.

The verse was naturally doggerel, and may be given in English as follows:

"Sweet Marietta,
Rarely has been
A sweeter or better
Face or form seen;
My chestnut tresses,
And my Spanish fall,
Would eclipse all the dresses
At the masked ball.
Then why, Marietta,
Dally? ah, no!
Pluck up, you'd better,
Your courage and go!"

And as she came to the last line, this impudent little maid whirled around, spinning her skirts about her like a top.

Mathias was enraptured.

With difficulty he kept himself from applauding.

"She'd make her fortune upon the stage!" he said to himself.

Marietta had made quite a conquest; a double conquest, it might almost be said.

The hidden robber was enraptured, and she was scarcely less pleased herself.

"I'll go," she said to herself. "Why should I not? They'll never find it out; I can do just as Cenerentola (Cinderella) did, and who knows but that some prince might fall over head and ears in love with me? I can get back before they do."

Out she skipped too, and tripped down the stairs.

She was off to the ball.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE CONTESSA'S FETE—A ROMANTIC ADVENTURE BETWEEN CERTAIN OLD FRIENDS.

THE most brilliant *fête* of the year was that given by the rich Contessa Maraviglia at her palazzo.

All the rank and fashion of the land were there.

The palazzo itself was a building of great beauty, and stood in grounds of wide extent.

The contessa, who was a widow, had a princely fortune, and she spent it lavishly, too.

Upon the night of the masquerade the gardens were brilliantly lighted.

Upon the miniature lake there was a fairy gondola, with a colored lantern dangling at the prow, and hung with curtains of pale blue silk gauze.

In this gondola a lady was seated.

She had taken to the gondola, not alone for the sake of the freshness of the breeze upon the water, but to read without interruption a letter she had received from a mysterious man who professed to be deeply smitten with her charms, and who, the messenger of love let fall, was a prince.

She wore a black domino but was not masked, for as she threw back its folds to breathe more freely, you could see that her only veil was a thick fall of black lace fastened to a high comb in the back of her head.

"I hope he will not be long," said she to herself, while her heart beat high with expectation. "His note says clearly enough on the lake in the fairy gondola. Well, it will certainly be nice to be a princess, but I do hope that his highness proves to be a dashing, handsome youth such as Cinderella might sigh for. Hush, boatman!"

"Lady."

"Do you hear?"

"Some one singing on the bank yonder? Yes; I hear, lady."

"Row that way."

A voice was heard carolling gently the serenade—"Fair Shines the Moon To-night."

The voice meant well, evidently, but something rather spoilt the effect.

It was not altogether in tune, nor had the singer the best idea in the world of time.

Perhaps his singing was spoilt by excess of love.

Perhaps by liquor.

The latter idea was suggested by a certain unsteadiness that would appear to indicate both love and liquor.

Be that as it may, the singer was not at all aware of the disadvantages under which he labored.

On the contrary, he had the greatest belief in himself.

"Boatman," exclaimed the lady, impatiently, "row me ashore."

"Yes, lady."

He obeyed, as he spoke, and as the boat grounded, the hidden minstrel stepped forward.

The gallant was rather a tall man, masked and habited in a long cloak, which almost concealed a glittering and gorgeous costume beneath.

This cavalier hastened to tender the lady his hand, and to assist her to disembark.

As soon as she was safely upon *terra firma*, the gentleman led her away to a more secluded part of the garden, and then ensued a brief, but highly interesting conversation.

It took place in the Italian language.

That beautiful tongue was not to say elegantly spoken upon either side.

The gentleman spoke as a foreigner but imperfectly acquainted with the idiom.

"Sir," said the lady, after an embarrassing silence upon his part, "I scarcely know if I ought to be here."

"Nor I either, my dear lady," began the gallant.

But then, aware that this was not exactly what might have been expected of him, he stammered and broke down.

"Poor prince," thought the lady, with a very unladylike chuckle to herself. "How embarrassed he is."

The cavalier stared at her through the great eyes in his mask, as he muttered to himself:

"She is evidently in love with me very badly; I am curious how to learn how a princess makes love. I am anxious only of course to study it as a matter of curiosity."

"I ought not to have come here, prince," said the lady in a nervous tone.

Prince!

The word made the masked gentleman stare.

"Prince! I suppose that she can't know I am a married man, and goes straight to the question. This is popping the question sharply."

He had never been made love to before by a lady of any degree, much less by a princess, so he was anxious to see how he would begin upon this occasion.

But after they had got to a quiet and remote part of the garden, they came to a dead lock.

Not a word was spoken on either side.

"I wish he would say something to me," thought the lady.

She was not used to such bashful suitors.

"I have kept your appointment, sir," she said, "although I fear I am very wrong."

"My appointment," muttered the cavalier in English. "Come, I like that."

However, he added in the softest tones he could assume:

"Fear nothing, princess, I am not a dangerous man."

She thought he was, though, for as he said this he chuckled.

The lady dropped her eyes before his bold glance and looked as timid as you could wish.

Now this appeared to encourage the gentleman, for he seized her round the waist and pressed a kiss upon the only part of her cheek which was left uncovered by her veil.

She struggled feebly, oh, very feebly to release

herself; but that libertine masker held her firmly; that is as firmly as possible, for he was not very strong upon his pins.

"Sir, you must not take advantage of my unprotected situation," she faltered.

"I should be very sorry to, my coy princess," said the gallant.

These words set her heart beating like clock-work.

"He means well," she thought, growing quite easy in her mind.

Meanwhile the ardent young lover, growing bolder by encouragement, wanted to remove her veil.

"Grant me one favor, my princess," he said. "Let me bask in the sunshine of your eyes, let me feast my vision upon your rare beauty."

The lady was enraptured at such poetical imagery.

"It sounds like a lovely book," she murmured in ecstasy.

But she would not accede to his request.

She was so filled with joy, so supremely happy that she feared to break the enchanting spell by any accident.

"Desist, prince," she said, struggling gently in his embrace.

"I must gaze upon the angelic face," said the passionate Adonis.

"Why," exclaimed the lady, "since you know it so well?"

"Know it!" exclaimed the gallant in surprise.

"Yes."

"I have never seen it."

"Yet your letter praises each feature to the skies."

"My letter!"

He was staggered evidently.

"Undoubtedly."

"I sent no letter."

The lady was amazed.

"If you sent no letter, why are you here?" she demanded.

"In obedience to yours," responded the gallant.

"My what?"

"Your note—your ever-to-be-treasured missive," gushed the swain.

Now what would have followed in the way of explanations it is impossible to say, for at this momentus crisis, a voice close by was heard repeating softly a couplet heard before:

"Dear Marietta,
Never had been
A sweeter or neater
Face or form seen,"

The lady started and screamed, and would have fallen had not the protecting arm of the gentleman been there to protect her. But her veil fell aside.

When the lover saw her face, he was staggered, and nearly let her fall.

"Marietta!" he exclaimed, "Marietta! Mrs. Harkaway's maid, by all that's wonderful!"

"Oh-o!" screamed the lady, "you're standing on my toe!" saying which, she jerked herself back, and dragging her foot away, too, down he went.

"It's Mr. Mole!" shrieked the lady; and catching up her pink skirt and black lace flounces, she fled precipitately along the path, leaving her admirer scrambling in the most undignified manner upon the gravel walk.

Poor Mr. Mole!

But, oh, poor Marietta! how sadly she was disappointed with her prince!

CHAPTER X.

MR. MOLE—THE THREE DEVILS AND THEIR DEVILMENT—THE CONTESSA'S JEWELS—AN ALARM.

"MR. MOLE—Mr. Mole!"

It was Harvey's voice.

Now Mr. Mole was convinced at once that Dick was at the bottom of this comical conspiracy in which he had been made to look so ridiculous.

So he resolved at first not to make any reply.

But Harvey was guided to the spot by information which had been furnished him concerning Mr. Mole, and he soon appeared in sight.

"Mr. Mole—Mr. Mole!" exclaimed Dick, in grave reproof.

"Help me up, Harvey," said Mole, "and don't be a fool."

"Well, that's polite."

"Quite as polite as you can expect."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know what I mean well enough."

"I'm hanged if I do!" protested Harvey, stoutly.

His manner caught Mr. Mole immediately.

So this led the old gentlemen to reflect.

If Dick did not know, it would be as well to keep the adventure to himself.

"Is it possible, Harvey, that you don't know what has occurred?"

"No."

"You don't know about Marietta?"

"No."

This decided Mole.

"Marietta is here."

"Never!" said Dick, in accents of deep mystery.

"A fact."

"Never! And who the dickens is Marietta when she is at home?"

"Mrs. Harkaway's maid, to be sure."

Dick burst out laughing at this.

"Why, Mr. Mole," he cried, "what a sly old fox you are."

Mr. Mole stared again.

"I don't quite understand what you are driving at, Mr. Harvey," said he.

"Don't you, though? well, I do, old sly-boots."

"Harvey!"

"Oh, don't you try to come the old soldier over me."

"Sir!" said Mr. Mole, rearing himself up to his full height upon his timber, "I don't understand your slangy allusions to the ancient military."

"Why, it is clear enough that you brought her."

"I what?" almost shrieked Mr. Mole, indignantly.

"Brought her, and your poor wife ought to know of it."

"Sir!" said Mole, "if you are bent upon insulting me, I shall leave your company."

"Go it, Mole," said Dick, laughing until the tears came into his eyes, "go it. The fact is, you have been sneaking about after that little girl for a long while past; there can be no doubt about it."

"Harvey, I repudiate your vile insinuations with scorn. The fact is, that in your anxiety to fix some wickedness never contemplated upon me, you forgot all the most important part of the tale."

"What?"

"Why, that girl has left the villa unprotected."

"Nonsense! there's old Costantino there."

"Useless."

"And Mike."

"He barks, but don't bite."

"Besides, you may be mistaken," urged Dick.

"Not I. I knew her at once, and what's more, she recognized me."

"The deuce!"

"And she bolted directly I pronounced her name."

"How was she dressed?"

Mr. Mole gave a hurried description of Marietta's dress, and they went off in search through the house and grounds after the flighty Marietta.

* * * * *

In another part of the grounds three men met.

"Hunston."

"Toro."

"Captain."

"Here."

"All safe?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"What have you learnt, Toro?"

"Not much."

"And you, captain?"

"Nothing, or next to nothing," was the reply.

"And you, Hunston?"

"I have gained knowledge," answered the latter; "good, useful knowledge."

The other two laughed heartily at this reply.

"You were always of a studious turn of mind, Hunston."

"Ha-ha-ha!"

It may be as well to mention they had sought a secluded part of the contessa's gardens, and met now by appointment.

They were all three arrayed in that peculiar style of costume which the prince of darkness is popularly supposed to don when he makes his appearance to German students, in certain weird and wild works of fiction, or in the supernatural drama.

It sounded remarkable to hear these three men, disguised as devils, discussing matters, generally, in such an off-hand manner.

The dresses of all three were alike, nearly in every particular.

The only mark of distinction between them was a small straight feather they wore in their caps.

One wore a yellow feather.

Another had a feather of brilliant red.

The third one's feather was of a bright emerald green.

Now these feathers were small, but yet, by reason of their conspicuous colors, could be seen at a considerable distance.

"What is it you have discovered?" asked the captain.

"Out with it, Hunston," said Toro, in his old impatient way.

"Well, in the first place," was Hunston's reply, "our letters to old Mole and to the girl Marietta were perfectly successful."

"Of course."

"The vanity of the one, and the conceit of the other made it an easy matter."

"It did."

"I saw the interview from a snug place of concealment, and took care to let her know it."

"How?"

"By humming her song which you heard her sing at the villa."

The latter looked somewhat alarmed at this.

"Was that prudent?"

"Of course she did not see me, only we must get a thorough hold over this girl, so as to have her as an accomplice in the enemy's camp always."

"Good."

"Now let us get back to the ball room, and see what is to be picked up there."

Back they went, and arrived in the large ball room just as a dance was being got up.

The three diabolical companions deemed it prudent now to separate, that no undue attention might be drawn upon their movements.

And they went sauntering about the rooms, each upon the lookout for any slice of luck which might turn up.

Hunston had added a long red cloak to his costume, so as to envelop his figure, and cover his arm, for fear of accidentally running across Harkaway or Harvey, or in fact, any of the party.

In this cloak he was wrapped, and silently watching two young and lovely girls, whose grace and elegance were commanding universal admiration.

One was fair as a lily, with light, golden, wavy hair, and full blue eyes.

This beautiful girl it was who excited Hunston's curiosity.

"Who can she be? Perhaps Harvey's daughter," he thought.

Now these two were equally lovely to gaze upon, the beauty of each being of a totally different character.

"If we can but spirit little Emily away to the mountains," said Hunston, to himself, "I shall be able to repay them for all I have suffered. Nay, more, I shall be able to satisfy the greed of Mathias and the band, by making the accursed Harkaway disgorge some of his enormous wealth."

A hand was placed upon his shoulder.

"Hah!"

"It is I," said a voice, in his ear.

And looking up, he beheld the devil in the red feather.

"Mathias."

"Hush! I have to rejoin a lady now, to whom I am engaged for the dance."

"The dance!"

Mathias nodded.

"She accepted at once a dance with the devil; I'll lead her a devil of a dance."

And the brigand captain laughed hugely at his own conceit.

But Hunston was not in laughing humor.

"I'm glad to find you so merry, captain."

The Greek did not observe his gloomy manner; he only replied:

"You will be merry, too, when I tell you the cause."

"I have no thought for the pleasures of these fools," said Hunston, gruffly; "I only think of business."

"I too."

"And yet you are going to dance, Captain Mathias."

"For business reasons, solely," said the Greek.

"Hoho!"

"My partner is positively bristling with diamonds," said the Brigand, significantly.

Hunston was interested immediately.

"Diamonds?"

"Ay! diamonds; and such diamonds, too. There is one as big as a nut, I swear."

"I must see this lady."

sation with a big man, admirable got up as a knight of the olden time.

The lady Hunston recognized at a glance, from the description which Mathias had given of her jewels.

Her finely-rounded arms were encircled by bracelets, set with the richest diamonds, that matched a necklace of priceless worth, apparently.

She wore a tiara, too, of the same costly make and setting.

The dance began.

It was a waltz.

Now the gallant Mathias acquitted himself to perfection in the dance, carrying his fair and richly-attired partner through the crowded room without getting at all jostled by the dancers.

Hunston followed their movements with the greatest possible interest, and as they shot past him for the third time around the room, he contrived to take from the Greek captain's hand one of the lady's bracelets, which he had with some dexterity removed.

The next round he was less successful.

As they shot past, the brigand's hand was outstretched, but Hunston missed it, and a glittering object dropped to the floor.

Hunston stooped to recover it, when:

"The lady has dropped something," said a voice, in his ear.

"What lady?" he demanded, recovering himself quickly.

"The contessa."

"Ah! I see. But was it the contessa?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. It is the lady dancing with your half-brother."

"Eh?"

Hunston started a little at these words.

They sounded very unpleasantly in his ear.

He had evidently been associated with Mathias by the speaker.

Now the latter was a strange-looking little being.

A stunted man, with broad, square shoulders, and got up to represent the description which Victor Hugo has given us of his creation of Quasimodo.

"That is the contessa?" said Hunston, recovering his presence of mind.

"Yes."

"I am very glad of it, for I shall be able to restore this to its proper owner."

"Of course."

Hunston arose, and with a slight inclination of the head, crossed the room, as if in search of the contessa.

The dwarf regarded him eagerly as he went.

"That's a rum one," he said to himself. "He means to pocket the contessa's bracelet—what a swindle. I thought there was something more devilish about him than his dress."

* * * * *

Hunston fled precipitately to the gardens.

Close by the spot where he had previously met his companion in crime, there was a man awaiting him with a bundle.

"Matteo is it you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good; give me the other dress out. Quick! I must change, and be back before my absence can be noticed."

As he spoke, he had already torn from the hands of the man Matteo a pair of trunks of blue cloth slashed with amber silk, and quick as an eye could wink, he was into them.

And then he fastened on a similarly-colored mantle.

"Tell me, Matteo, does that change me?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Good! Take this."

"What, jewels!"

"Hush! hear all, see all, and say nothing. Away with you, now."

"Yes. Where to?"

"Back to the mountains, where we can always guard what we have made."

"True."

Just then there was a commotion in the ballroom, and a voice was heard to cry out:

"The contessa has lost her richest diamonds and other precious stones. There are robbers here. No one must leave the grounds."

"By Heaven!" ejaculated Hunston; "we are lost."

CHAPTER XI.

HUNSTON'S ADVENTURE—MOLE IN A MAZE—HE MEETS AN EVIL SPIRIT—GROSS OUTRAGE ON HIS WOODEN LEGS—MATHIAS IN TROUBLE—THE ASSASSIN'S KNIFE.

QUASIMODO, who had detected one of the devils, was Magog Brand.

The audacity of the fearless Greek had carried him through so far, but Quasimodo had spoiled him at last.

A number of gentlemen in the company began to inquire into the affair.

Prominent among them was Harkaway.

He and Jefferson, prompt to act as ever, inquired into the circumstances of this gross outrage, and then it was elicited that the predicator was seen last in diabolical costume.

"A devil!" ejaculated one of the company. "Of course, I saw the man myself."

"I, too," said another.

"Yes, he wore a red feather in his high crowned hat."

"No," said another; "a feather, it is true, but the feather was green, I am sure."

Upon this, Magog Brand came forward.

"I saw it all done," he said. "I saw the man who did it."

"What, rob the contessa?"

"Yes, and as soon I saw what it meant, I gave the alarm; but the devil disappeared like greased lightning."

"There!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once, "I said it was the devil."

"Yes," added one of the guests, eagerly. "What colored feather had he?"

"Red," ejaculated another, immediately.

"Green," retorted the opposite faction, loudly, but Magog Brand said:

"It was neither red nor green," said he; "but a bright yellow."

Now, while this inquiry was being proceeded with, nobody happened to observe one singular circumstance.

That was the presence, the whole of the time, in the motley-colored crowd, of one of the diabolical trio in question.

This very devil no sooner heard the question raised about the colored feathers in their head gear, then he doffed his hat unperceived and pulled out the feather.

And then as the controversy grew warmer, he sneaked off.

He made with all possible haste for the garden gate.

Once here he was about to rush through, when he was accosted by two men, whose uniform gave him an unpleasant twinge.

They were *gens d'armes*.

"You cannot leave the grounds yet, sir," said one of them, sharply.

"I don't wish to," replied the devil, promptly.

"I come to bring you orders."

"I beg your pardon," said the *gen d'arme*.

"A robbery has been committed."

"Yes, sir."

"That is the reason you have had your orders to guard the gate. Oh, you know it. Well, what you don't know is that the robbery is supposed to have been committed by a masker dressed as I am. Take particular note of my dress."

"Yes, sir."

The *gen d'arme* grinned as he said this.

"Keep your eyes open. These are the contessa's particular orders."

"Trust me, sir."

"There is a reward if you capture the thief."

The *gen d'arme* laughed at this and said, with an air of self-confidence:

"I think I shall get him."

The merry devil slapped the *gen d'arme* upon the back, heartily.

"You are the sort of man for my money."

Saying which, he turned and left the spot.

Making his way to a place in the grounds previously agreed upon, he ran across the brigand Matteo armed with a change of dress for him.

The spot selected was up one of the narrowest alleys in the grounds, at the end of which was a species of Hampton Court maze in miniature.

Just as the diabolical one was about to divest himself of half of his skin, Matteo gave the alarm.

"The devil!" ejaculated the masker, which was, perhaps, the most natural exclamation he could make, all things considered. "What can this be? Somebody watched me here."

He waited a minute or so in anxiety.

An unsteady footfall was heard upon the gravel walk, and a man in a cloak came staggering along.

"They may call this a grand *fête* if they like," he mumbled. "I call it a shabby affair. Why, there's not a respectable drink in the place. The lucky thing is that I have provided my own."

He had a bottle with him, and he sucked at it from time to time as he staggered on, until all of a sudden he ran on to the alarmed masker, who was growing impatient to change his garments.

The staggering one looked up, and seeing such an alarming figure towering over him, he gave a wild howl, and fled.

"The devil—the devil!" he shouted, wildly. "Help—help!"

"Stop that fool, Matteo, or he will bring the whole house down about our ears."

Matteo seized the merry maker, and was about to make short work with him, when his superior held his hand.

"Put by your knife," he said; "not that. Hold him tight and threaten him; but no knife."

But for this timely interference, it would have gone hard with the unfortunate new comer, who was our old friend Mole.

Mole, it should be noted, had been compelled to change his cork legs, on which he could scarcely stand, for his old, familiar stumps, which arsy had brought with him in case accident urged.

"Forgive me, Mr. Devil," he implored, in drunken tones, "oh, forgive me."

"Mole!" exclaimed the devil, in a thrilling voice. "Your evil deeds are known to me."

"Oh—oh—oh!" groaned the wretched Isaac, piteously.

"Your time has come."

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped Mole.

"Never."

"Give me a little time, Mr. Devil."

"No."

"Oh, do—do, for the sake of my twins," said Mole, in his most persuasive manner, "and I'll stand anything you like to—hic—to name. Don't take me away, but come and liquor up with me."

"Silence!" thundered the irritable devil.

"I'm dumb."

"Away with you, and repent."

Mole staggered off.

As soon as he was gone, Matteo assisted his master to change his garments, and in the space of five minutes at the outside, the devil disappeared, and was replaced by a gay cavalier, habited in a rich costume of blue slashed with amber, and a broad brimmed sombrero.

The excitement occasioned by the impudent robbery of the Contessa Maraviglia's jewels, had not by any means subsided, so the confusion prevailing in consequence was highly favorable to Hunston's new villainy for trapping little Emily.

Nearing the entrance to the ball room he came to a conservatory, into which Mr. Mole had strolled, or let us say staggered, and then dropped into a seat.

Hunston glided in unperceived by Mole, and concealed himself behind some thick shrubs close to him.

Mole was bent upon making himself comfortable.

The irrepressible bottle was out again.

"I feel," mumbled Mole, little thinking that there was a listener near, "I feel that I am a devil of a fellow. All the ladies love me, and all the men fear me. I'm too much for anyone of them, ha-ha-ha! I've taken a rise out of the devil himself!"

Here he had a suck at the bottle.

"I'm getting quite familiar with evil spirits to-night," he said, grinning; "I don't think he'll see me again in a hurry—he-he!"

He raised the bottle again to his lips, when a ghostly voice sounded in his ear:

"Beware!"

He turned pale, and then got very red in the face.

"Who's there?" said Mole, looking nervously around; "come in, don't knock; what a fool I am!"

"Remember!" said the same hollow voice as before.

"Oh, Lor—oh, Lor!" cried Mole; "I'm gone; he's there again."

"Beware!"

"I'm gone—I'm going!" cried Mole; "oh, Lor—oh, Lor!"

And off he ran, Hunston following closely behind him.

Now Hunston got near enough to him to see that he was really trying to get little Emily and Paquita to take care of him for a time, and walk with him in the grounds.

"There will be two of them to take care of," said Hunston, following them up as closely as was prudent; "that complicates matters. I hope Matteo has taken his measures carefully."

Matteo had.

They drew near to the entrance of the maze, and Hunston began to look anxiously about him for Matteo and the rest of their accomplices.

"I think we had better return," he heard little Emily say.

Suddenly a whistle was blown, and five or six men sprang out from the maze.

In less time than it takes to record the outrage, the two girls were seized and borne off in stout relentless arms, their cries being stifled by thick wraps thrown over their heads.

"To the small gate," exclaimed Hunston.

Mole recognized the familiar voice of Hunston, and the whole danger flashed into his mind at once, sobering him most effectually.

"Hunston, you villain, I know you!" he cried. "And I will lose my life rather than harm should come to these dear girls."

Hunston turned and faced him savagely.

"If you know me, Mole," he said meaningfully, "then beware of me."

Mole's only reply was to grapple with him, with all his strength.

But the foolish old man was hurled to the ground, and then one of the brigands fell upon him, brandishing a huge knife.

Hunston here interfered, and gave a command which made the men laugh very heartily.

A fresh outrage was perpetrated, and in the space of two minutes, Mr. Mole found himself alone, and on his back.

"Hunston, you black-hearted thief," he cried, "I'll follow you if—"

He tried to rise, but down he went again.

He was lop-sided.

And why?

The brigands had amputated one of his wooden legs.

* * * * *

Leaving them for a moment, let us return to Mathias.

That daring scoundrel was not satisfied with having escaped a great danger scot free, and made a very rich prize, but he must needs return to the Palazzo Maraviglia in another dress, in quest of fresh plunder.

The fact was that he was flushed with wine.

Else he would have thought twice of returning.

Mingling with the crowd in the large ballroom, he came to a group discussing the late robbery in great excitement, and as he was pressing forward to learn what he could, he became entangled in a lady's lace flounces.

He turned sharply to apologize, and recognized the figure at once.

"The lovely Marietta," he exclaimed.

She heard him, and made off to the other end of the room, closely followed by Mathias, who had conceived a violent fancy for her.

"Stay, senorita," he exclaimed, seizing her hand.

"What do you want with me?" said Marietta.

"Only to plead—"

"Nonsense," she exclaimed, interrupting him abruptly; "you don't know me."

"Let me plead—"

"Bother!"

"Nay," said the persistent robber, "if you will not hear me speak, hear me sing."

And then, being an admirable mimic, he imitated her strut before the looking-glass, and general coquettish behavior in the dressing-room at the villa, while he sang in a falsetto voice:

"Sweet Marietta,
Rarely has been
A sweeter or better
Face or form seen,
Dear Marietta!"

"Hah!" cried the girl, starting back as if she had been shot.

Her first impulse was to faint.

But as soon as she had gained the cooler air without, she recovered, and collecting her senses a little, she gave a pretty shrewd guess at the truth.

She was a silly, yet not a bad-natured girl.

She saw her duty plainly enough.

She must make herself known at once to her master.

Harkaway was close at hand, discussing the robbery still with Jefferson.

The whole of this party were of course known to Marietta; so she made straight up to Harkaway, and said, hurriedly:

"Have that man seized, sir—see, that one who is following me. I am Marietta. He has just said something to me, which convinces me that he was hiding in the villa to-night."

"Halloo!" exclaimed Harkaway, not a little startled at this sudden address; "why, what in Heaven's name—"

"Lose no time," interrupted Marietta eagerly, "or he will go—see, he has taken the alarm."

"The girl's right," said Jefferson, striding off after Mathias.

The latter now began to perceive that he had

made a false step, and he hurried through the crowded room towards the door, and was just passing out, when a dwarfed and ugly figure leaped upon him.

So sudden was the attack, that Mathias was capsized, and together they rolled upon the floor.

"Let go!" said the Greek, fiercely, "or I'll—"

"Not me!" exclaimed Magog Brand—for he was the Greek's assailant. "I know you, my yellow-feathered devil, even though you have shed your skin!"

"Let go," hissed the Greek brigand, with compressed lips, "or I'll have your life!"

"I'll not let go," cried the brave little Brand. "I have got you, villain, and will hold you. Ah!"

Mathias scrambled up, and tried to fly, but he was met with a blow from Jefferson's fist which might have felled an ox in the shambles.

He dropped lifeless on the ground beside Magog.

And then a sudden outcry arose; for it was found that in that brief struggle, poor Magog Brand had been cruelly used.

A long-bladed poinard was buried up to the hilt in his side.

Poor Brand!

Death must have been almost instantaneous!

They tore the mask from Mathias' face, and thereupon an agent of the secret police stepped forward and made known who it was.

"This is the notorious Mathias," he said. "One of the most daring brigands hereabouts; we have been wanting him badly for some time past."

"You have got him," said Harkaway, "but oh!" he added, glancing at the lifeless form of Magog Brand, "at what a price for us!"

At this juncture Harvey reached the spot, and taking in the whole scene at a glance, he dropped on his knees beside the body of Magog Brand, where Jefferson was already kneeling, seemingly half stupefied by the catastrophe.

"He has fainted," said he to Harvey in explanation.

Harvey shook his head mournfully.

"He'll never faint again, Jefferson."

"What?"

"Never."

"You surely—no—no. Brand, dear old boy, look up."

He faltered and broke down.

"Yes, Jefferson," said Harvey, in deep emotion. "Poor Magog Brand is at the end of his troubles and pleasures alike—he is dead!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PURSUIT OF THE BRIGANDS—THE BATTLE—VARYING FORTUNES—HOW HUNSTON AND TORO WERE LAID BY THE HEELS.

CONSTERNATION was upon every face.

The catastrophe was so sudden and unlooked for, that the people about were half stupefied with fear.

A dreadful picture the group presented.

On one side lay poor Magog Brand, lately so full of life and animation.

On the other was his assassin, felled by the dead man's best friend, the doughty Jefferson, and with scarcely more life in him than his victim.

And while the people were staring hopelessly at each other thus, a voice was heard giving the alarm hard by.

"Poor Brand, your murderer shall not escape," said Jefferson, bitterly.

The noise continued, and presently the voice was recognized.

"It is Mole," cried Harkaway, in alarm.

He was right.

Just then the poor old gentleman appeared upon the scene, crawling along as fast as he was able.

"Harkaway, Jefferson, Harvey!" he cried.

"What's the matter?"

"Murder, abduction!" returned Mole. "Hunston is here."

"By Heaven! I thought it," ejaculated Jefferson.

"He has carried off Emily and Paquita."

"What?"

"I interfered, but they were too many for me. See how they have used me."

"Was he with the brigands?" demanded Harkaway.

"I suppose so. A whole mob of ruffians."

"Where are they gone?"

"By the small gate."

A hurried explanation ensued with the agent of the secret police, who gave them a few words of comfort.

"He'll never be able to pass my men at the gate," said the officer, with great confidence. This was doubtful.

They knew too well Hunston's boldness and audacity.

But they lost no time in getting up a pursuit.

The contessa's stables were well furnished, and two horses were speedily saddled for Harkaway and Jefferson.

Harvey, too impatient to wait for a mount, had rushed wildly away in the direction of the small gate followed by Mr. Mole.

Here he saw to his dismay that a scramble had taken place, in which the *gens d'armes* had got decidedly the worst of it.

The two who had been on guard at the gate had got very roughly handled, one having a broken crown and the other showing an ugly wound in the side.

"They have gone this way, then?" exclaimed Harvey, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Which way?"

"They made for the right," faltered one of the wounded men.

"It is long?"

"No; a few moments."

"They cannot get far," said the *gen d'arme* with the broken pate; "the two girls were struggling hard with them."

"Hurrah!" cried Harvey. "I'll save my child yet."

"You are not first in the hunt," said the other *gen d'arme*, speaking with evident pain; "there are two black men after them."

"That must be Sunday and Monday," exclaimed Harvey.

And off he ran.

He bounded over the ground like a deer, and when he got about half a mile further on, he came suddenly upon two men struggling.

One of them was a negro.

Who, in fact, but our old friend, the Prince of Limbi, the faithful Monday.

The other was one of the Greeks, a face unknown to Harvey, but one who has already figured in these pages.

Matteo!

And lying on the ground near him was a brigand, struck down dead by brave Monday.

As Harvey came up, it was nearing the end of what had been a precious tough fight.

Monday was uppermost, and Matteo, who had gradually succumbed to the wiry negro, was by this time in a very queer way indeed.

Monday held him by the throat, and in spite of his desperate efforts to set himself free, Matteo had lost his breath.

And there he lay completely at the negro's mercy.

"There, you dam tief!" exclaimed the Prince of Limbi, "take dat, an' dat—an' dat, an' now, by golly, have dis for a little bit in."

At every word he pressed harder and harder and jerked his adversary back.

The "little bit in" settled Matteo completely. Something seemed to crack in the wretched Greek's throat, and he dropped back.

"Monday—Monday!" cried Harvey, eagerly; "where are they?"

"Halloo, Massa Dick!" said faithful Monday; "I se gwine to give this fellar toko an' den I'll jine yar."

"He's done for," said Dick, hastily. "Come now."

"He might come to," said Monday, in some doubt.

"No fear."

"Perhaps."

"Why, he'll never trouble any one more," returned Harvey; "tell me, where have they gone?"

"They went straight on."

"This road?"

"Yes."

"Good. Come or stay. I'll go," exclaimed Harvey.

And off he ran.

Monday gave his silent enemy a shake to see if it was all over.

"He's a gone coon," he said to himself. "I'll bolt off after Massa Dick."

Away he ran at a good swinging trot.

In about ten minutes more he came up with him.

And this was under the most alarming circumstances.

Not very long after this a horseman dashed up to the spot, and only drew rein to give a glance at the lifeless form of the wretched Matteo.

"He's dead," said the horseman, who was none other than Jack Harkaway. "This looks like some of Dick's handiwork. Dick or some of our party. I hope Dick is safe."

Saying which, he whipped up his horse, and tore on at a mad gallop.

A very few minutes after this he came up with the brigands with their captives.

Just in the nick of time.

Hunston and Toro were there both with their hands full, while the Greeks had all their work to do to take care of the two captive girls.

Little Emily and Paquita, having now recovered from their surprise, were lending assistance to the cause by keeping all the Greeks fully occupied in looking after them.

And while they were thus occupied, Sunday and Dick Harvey were engaged with Toro and Hunston.

Dick had rushed so violently upon Hunston that the latter was toppled over, and it looked as though Harvey was about to make short work with his old enemy.

But alas for Sunday!

The poor negro was overmatched.

His heart was good, but the weight and enormous strength of the Italian were too much for him to vanquish.

That he had not as yet succumbed to Toro, was due only to his vastly superior agility and activity.

It was all in vain for the Italian ruffian to try and close with him.

Sunday would not have this.

He knew that his chance lay in keeping Toro at a respectful distance.

And so he danced around him, dropping an occasional smart rap which goaded the Italian to fury.

"Help!" cried Hunston. "Cut him down! cut him down!"

One of the brigands rushed at Harvey knife in hand, and thus created a momentary diversion in his favor.

Had not Harkaway just then appeared upon the scene, it might have gone hard with his comrade Dick.

Prompt, however, to act at this critical juncture, Harkaway spurred his horse into the group and rode them down.

Then reining up, he flung himself from his horse, and went into the mêlée.

"I'm in it, Dick, old boy," cried Jack; "here's one for Harkaway."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick, in great excitement. "A Harkaway—a Harkaway to the rescue!"

Toro turned to Harkaway with a cry of rage.

"Curse you!" he shouted; "I'll have your life now, or you shall have mine!"

"By all means," said old Jack, cheerfully.

"Cur!"

"Come, now," said Harkaway, with subdued rage, "I can't stand that; take this!"

And before Toro knew where he was, he got it.

It was not as pleasant as he could have wished when he did get it.

A devil of a thud it came upon his nose, a fair blow with Harkaway's fist, and being delivered straight from the shoulder, it seemed to the Italian like the kick of a donkey.

Toro shook all over.

His eyes flashed fireworks, and he was half stunned for the moment,

Harkaway's triumph was but temporary.

One of the Greeks who was watching the conflict between these giants of the combat with great interest, had by now crept up behind Jack, and seizing him suddenly around the middle, hurled him to the ground.

"Ha-ha!" yelled Toro.

And bounding forward, he fell upon Harkaway, knife in hand.

"At last—at last your life is in my hands," he cried, in fiend-like joy.

The knife gleamed in the air.

A piercing shriek from little Emily was heard.

A cry of fear from Paquita, and suddenly the latter, disengaging herself from her captors, bounded forward and seized Toro by the hair.

She dragged him back with all her strength, and, little as it was, it saved the life of Jack Harkaway.

Jack put forth all his strength at this most critical juncture, and succeeded in grappling once more with his herculean opponent.

Toro lost his balance.

A moment more and he was rolling upon the ground in deadly battle with brave Jack Harkaway.

So fierce a strife could not last long.

In the heat of the combat cries were heard encouraging Harkaway and Harvey to fresh exertions, and up dashed the bold Monday, closely followed by Jefferson and several gentlemen from the contessa's fête.

The Greeks now began to lose heart.

The odds were veering around to the wrong side.

Greeks can fight moderately well when they are three or four to one Englishman, but when the numbers are equal, they do not care to provoke hostilities.

And so they blew upon their whistles for assistance, and soon the answering calls came in every direction, causing the gravest fears to the Harkaway faction.

"Ha!" ejaculated Jefferson; "they are coming to help you. But at least I'll make sure of you, Master Toro."

The Italian did not shirk the encounter.

Toro, to do him justice, was, with all his faults, no coward.

He had felt the weight of Jefferson's arm and he had reason to remember it.

Yet he met his old adversary boldly.

Jefferson fell upon the huge Italian with tiger-like fury, and in spite of his prodigious size and weight, he lifted him in his arms, swung him around, and hurled him to the ground.

The Greeks now seeing their leaders in such dire peril, thought of avenging themselves by the most dastardly expedients.

"Kill the girls!" cried one of them.

The hint was caught up with avidity.

A savage yell responded to the bloodthirsty suggestion, and the lives of the two innocent girls were in real peril.

"Look to the girls!" shouted Dick Harvey, who was fully occupied with two of the Greek brigands who were pressing him closely.

There was a cheer in response to this appeal, and over went two of the Greeks.

Jefferson, too, lent a hand at this juncture.

Finding himself free from Toro's attentions, for the huge Italian had received such a desperate shaking with his fall that he was not fit for much now, he rushed into the mêlée and dealt out such slogging blows that there were at least a dozen bleeding noses and black eyes distributed amongst the bandits in rather less time than it takes to note the fact.

The Greeks were thoroughly discouraged.

The unpleasantly British mode of attack was not at all to their liking.

The could do pretty well with knives or swords or even with firearms, but they could only regard men who used their fists in the light of savages.

Gradually they retreated before the fierce onslaught of the Britishers and the gallant Yankee ally.

This was no small triumph.

The brigands mustered at least twenty men.

Their enemies were five.

The five were Harkaway, Harvey, Jefferson, and the two negroes, Sunday and Monday.

The chicken hearted Greeks, however, did not altogether turn tail, for ere they could get fairly off this hardly contested field, they received considerable reinforcements.

About ten more Greeks put in an appearance.

A ragged, ruffian crew, and ill-armed.

The Harkaway party were not armed at all.

The Greeks fell back and made attempts to reform in something like good order.

But Jefferson saw the danger and he followed them up closely.

Jack and Dick Harvey were at his heels.

Neither of our old friends were inferior to the bold Jefferson in courage; but they did not possess his great advantages of size and strength.

Jefferson's right arm went out like a battering ram, and each time he struck out, down dropped a man.

At all events, the brigands did not give any particular signs of coming up for a repetition dose.

The huge American dashed into the thick of the enemy.

The assassination of poor little Magog Brand had fired his fury, and his charge was something terrific.

He dashed into the midst of the half-cowed bandits, and swinging his arms around him like the sails of a windmill, he "grassed" a man at every stroke.

But this could not last for long.

As the Greeks grew stronger in numbers, they stood upon the defensive.

They were reassured.

They had seven-and-twenty men against the five.

The five, too, large-hearted though they were, had the two girls to look after.

Amongst the latest comers upon the bandits' side was one man who was a petty officer of the brigands, and he gave a few hurried commands which had the effect of putting Harkaway and his friends into a very awkward predicament.

"Load and fire," said the brigand. "Shoot them all down."

If they could but succeed in getting a shot or two at the bold Jefferson, or at any of the party, it would speedily be all over with them.

But now, when individual bravery could no longer avail them, they had a rare slice of luck.

Suddenly a rattling volley of musketry was heard, and three of the Greeks bit the dust, while a number of cries told that several were hit.

And then a detachment of gendarmes dashed up into the open at a swinging trot.

And who headed this very welcome party?

Who but two youths that have been heard of before in these pages!

Who indeed but young Jack Harkaway and his friend Harry Girdwood?

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDAY RUBS OFF AN OLD SCOPE—THE BRIGANDS—WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PORTER'S LODGE—A STRANGE BLIND BEGGER.

"HURRAH!"

"Give them another."

"Load again!"

"Another volley!"

A rapid, irregular discharge followed, and the Greeks, with cries of fear and rage, dropped their arms and fled precipitately, panic-stricken.

The *gens d'armes* followed them up, and several were knocked over and secured; and behind them the brigands had left no less than seven of their number who had not been able to get off.

Among those seven were two men that it was no small gratification to the Harkaway party to see once more in their power.

These two men were Hunston and Toro, the Italian.

Sunday stood over the latter, leathering into his half insensible carcass in a way that threatened to cover it with bruises, and at every blow he had something fresh to say.

"Take dat!" he exclaimed, punching into Toro's ribs, "you dam nigger!"

Toro, dazed with what he had suffered in his shaking, could offer no resistance.

"And dere's another, you ugly tief!" said the virtuous Sunday. "I'll gib you what for; you shall hab what Daddy gib the drum, you 'fernall black skunk; I show yar what John up de orchard is, you—you Italian organ-grinding sweep—you chestnut-munching beast!"

Sunday had never forgotten his first acquaintance with Toro.

The reader will doubtless bear it in mind, since with it is connected one of the most startling episodes of Jack Harkaway's history, in his voyage around the world with young Jack.

It was at the hotel in New York that the Harkaways first met with Sunday, too, for here they were the means of rescuing him from the brutal violence of the ruffian Toro.

It was, in fact, this which led up to that scene of terror—the firing of the hotel, by Hunston and Toro.

Sunday had suffered at Toro's hands, but had never had his whack back.

But now the darkey showed the half-insensible Italian the full signification of "John up de orchard," and likewise of "what for," and "what Daddy gave the drum."

* * * * *

Hunston and Toro were thrown into prison with the few brigands captured, and the discomfited chieftain, Mathias.

Such was the end of their exploit.

When once they were in prison, however, it required some exertion on the part of the authorities to keep them there.

The gang were unceasing in their endeavors to release them.

Artifices of every kind were tried to accomplish it, but the Harkaways had foreseen that no stone would be left unturned by the murderous friends of the captured robber; and they knew the good old-fashioned saying: "Forewarned, forearmed."

The prison in which they were confined was situated at the waterside, and it was approachable by boat, where the entrance was beneath a low vaulted archway.

The day after the capture of the notorious robbers, a poor cripple hobbled up to the porter's lodge, dragging himself painfully along by the aid of a stick in one hand and a crutch under his other arm.

"Move off," said the porter, gruffly; "we have nothing to give away here."

"I don't ask your charity," replied the crip-

ple, humbly; "accept this, good sir, as a peace offering."

And then, to the porter's surprise, he dropped a coin into his hand.

The porter looked hard at the coin in his hand, and then at the cripple.

He was a man of no sentiment, this porter, and so he asked the generous donor bluntly what he wanted for the money.

"I only want to show you some consideration and kindness, if possible, to some of the unfortunate inmates of this place," was the reply.

"Prisoners?"

"Yes."

"If you expect that," said the porter, "you had better take back your money, for I have nothing to do with the prisoners."

The cripple looked grave, and he muttered to himself:

"The fool is beastly conscientious. If he had only proved a bit of a rogue, there was a chance—the ass!"

But he did not mean to yield the point yet.

"You are a very good man," he said to the porter; "a worthy, honest fellow, and you will know that I don't mean to offer you anything like a bribe."

The porter stared.

"A bribe!" he said, with an expletive. "You had better not."

"Ahem!" coughed the cripple. "My friend, I have confined in this prison my son, a poor, misguided boy—"

"They are mostly that," said the porter, shortly.

"But he is innocent."

"They are all innocent," said the porter.

"All?"

"According to their own showing."

"But my boy is."

"No doubt."

"And I only want to beg you to do what you can to soften his lot—a hard lot it is, too."

"I can do nothing, I tell you," said the porter; "I never see the prisoners."

"I thought—"

"At least, when I say never, I mean only when they are allowed to walk in the prison yard."

"That is here?"

"Yes."

"When is that?"

"Once a day; sometimes more than that, if the doctor orders it."

"The doctor must order it, then," said the cripple to himself.

"What is your son in for?" asked the porter.

"For an unfortunate resemblance he bears to a notorious brigand."

"Bah!" said the porter. "They don't imprison a man for being like another."

"Yes, they do; my unlucky son has been taken for Mathias the brigand."

"What?" ejaculated the doorkeeper, "do you mean that Mathias is not Mathias?"

"I mean that my son has been taken for Mathias, to whom, indeed, he is so like that nothing but the capture of the real culprit can save my son."

The doorkeeper eyed the cripple sharply.

But the latter stood it coolly enough.

"Well," said the door-porter, "if that is the case, it is certainly a very hard job for your son; what do you want me to do for him? I can't let him out."

"My friend," exclaimed the cripple, "think you I would suggest such a thing? No, all I would ask of you is to soothe him with a kind word."

"I'll tell him when next he comes out."

"At what time did you say?" asked the cripple, looking on the ground as though he only put the question casually.

"At twelve."

The cripple's eyes glistened as he heard this.

"Well—well," he said, pressing some more money into the door-porter's hand, "I'll call again, and perhaps you may have seen my boy, and comforted him with the assurance that I'll save him, in spite of all the ill these accursed English people can work by the aid of their money."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the porter. "The English are at work in it, eh?"

"Yes. They owe him some spite, and money, you know, can buy anything—anything."

And blessing the gate-keeper, he hobbled off.

* * * * *

Near the prison he overtook a blind man begging by the roadside, and while stopping to drop a coin in his hat, the cripple contrived to whisper a few hurried words to this effect:

"I have made a step—almost made a breach in the fortress."

"You have!"

And the blind man turned his head to the right, and to the left, almost as though looking out to see if they were unwatched.

"Yes; the prison yard is only the other side of that gate. Now that gate is kept by a porter who is already ours."

"Good—good, Tomaso!" quoth the blind man.

"Now, listen."

"Go on," returned the blind man.

"At noon the prisoners are in the yard. If we could but get that gate open for an instant, and have our men ready hereabouts for a rush—"

"Yes—yes."

"Who can tell what may happen?"

"Good again—good again! Ha-ha-ha! that's brave, that is. Why, the mob of idle sightseers who crowd about the prison gates at noon to watch the prisoners, might all be poor blind wretches, or helpless cripples like you and I."

"Of course."

"And if the gate is left open but one instant—a single inch, no more—why, worlds might be done."

"A horse ready saddled near at hand might be worth thinking of."

"True."

"And a small keg of gunpowder blown up under the archway by the waterside entrance would divert attention."

"Tomaso," ejaculated the blind man, "you're born to be a captain of brigands some time!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TOMASO HELPED HIS FRIENDS IN TROUBLE—
THE SKIRMISH IN THE PRISON—MATHIAS THE
BRIGAND.

TOMASO, before the day was over, changed his garments and abandoned crutch and stick, and when he turned out with flaxen-dyed hair and spectacles, and presented himself at the other great entrance of the prison, as a German traveller who desired to go over the place, no one could possibly have imagined it to be the old cripple, whose paternal lamentations had so touched the doorkeeper's heart.

"You have got here a notorious brigand, as I have heard tell," said the visitor.

"We have, sir," was the governor's reply; "a very remarkable man he is, too."

"Ah, so I have heard," said the visitor. "He is called Demetrius, I believe."

"Nay; his name is Mathias."

The visitor looked surprised at this information.

"Mathias—Mathias!" he repeated to himself. "I was misinformed then. I certainly thought that his name was Demetrius."

The governor smiled.

"You may be right all the same," said he.

"How so?"

"Why, Mathias is but his avowed name; he may be known by a dozen different aliases."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the sham German traveler.

"Indeed it is. These robbers are mostly adepts at disguise. Would you like to see this Mathias?" demanded the governor, courteously.

"Vastly."

"Well, sir, I'll only warn you of one thing."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"A disappointment awaits you in this."

"How so?"

"Instead of seeing a ferocious fellow, such as you might expect, Mathias is really a very pleasant and innocent-looking man."

The governor of the prison then led the visitor through the long stone corridors of the place where Mathias was confined.

They stopped before a door of great thickness, heavily barred, and studded with iron bolts and nails.

The governor tapped at a small grated trap in the door, and it was pulled aside.

At the grating a broad-shouldered fellow appeared, who touched his cap at the visitors.

"So that is Mathias," said the German gentleman.

"No—no," said the governor; "that is the jailer who is shut up with him."

"What for?"

"So that he may be watched night and day; the authorities have doomed him to—"

"To what?"

"To death," replied the governor, in a low but impressive voice.

"He is young."

"In years, yes," answered the governor, "but old in crime. This man has been guilty of nearly every crime under the sun—brigandage is one of his least offenses. His last exploit is the worst."

"What is that?"

"Murder."

"Murder!"

And the German traveler looked inexpressibly shocked.

"Murder is a capital crime in every land."

"And rightly, too," said the visitor, "rightly, too. But, sir, excuse my curiosity—"

"Ask all you will," returned the governor.

"This man had, I was told, a bold, dashing fellow to second him in all his exploits."

"An Italian?"

"No."

"An Englishman?"

"No—no, sir, you mistake; I mean a Greek—a handsome, dashing fellow—a great favorite with the ladies—brave and daring."

"And how is this Apollo called?"

"Tomaso."

The governor burst into a loud fit of laughter at this.

"You are altogether mistaken about that brigand—that Tomaso. He is a scrubby and ill-favored scamp, a sneaking, crawling rascal, capable of all the villainy of his master, but not possessed of his courage."

Had the governor been looking at the visitor's face just then, he might have had his suspicions aroused.

The sham German philanthropist glared furiously as this description was given.

The prisoner, who was seated at a rough deal table at the further end of the cell, here arose at the jailer's order, and came to the window.

A single glance sufficed to show that a very noticeable change had taken place in the appearance of Matthias.

His face was pale and haggard, and the whole of one side of it, the eye, cheek bone and forehead, was fearfully bruised.

This was the mark that Jefferson had set upon him.

This was the bold American's only vengeance for the death blow which the brigand had dealt upon his faithful friend and companion, Magog Brand.

Jefferson's right arm came down like a steam hammer, and any man who had felt its full force as the scoundrel Mathias had did not forget it very readily.

Such a desperate shaking had it given Mathias that he had not yet recovered.

The bold, defiant bearing of the man was gone, and he looked ten years older than when Tomaso and he had last met.

It struck the visitor at once.

"Dear—dear me," exclaimed the latter, "is it possible that this can be the redoubtable Mathias?"

"It is he," said the governor, "yet scarcely so gay as is his wont, eh, Mathias?"

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

"Laugh on, your excellency," he said, rather bitterly, "it is your turn now."

"Now!"

"Ay, now. It may not always be."

"Why, surely you never think of getting out of this?"

"Indeed, I think of nothing else morning, noon, and night."

The governor gave a sharp glance about.

He looked towards the jailer.

Now the jailer was a huge fellow, over six feet high and broad in proportion, one who could have tackled Toro himself, as far as weight and sheer brute strength went.

"Your excellency," replied Mathias, "when I leave this place, my exit will be due to no violence. Bad as I am, I am not altogether what they would make out."

"Poor Mathias!" said the governor, ironically, "one would almost think that murder was not his line of business."

"Your excellency," said the prisoner, drawing near to the grated window, "I repent sincerely of that poor little gentleman's death; it was no assassin's stab in the dark, but a most unfortunate blow in a fight, remember."

"Bravo! Mathias! bravo!" ejaculated the visitor.

The prisoner looked up.

A strange expression flitted across his face.

Mathias was an adept in the art of dissimulation, and his face was schooled to tell neither more nor less than he wished.

"Now, your excellency," said the visitor, "this rascal appears strangely self-possessed."

"He does."

"What does it mean?"

"Brag."

"Humph!"

"Ah, you do not know him, sir, as well as I do."

"Perhaps not; but it might just be possibl

that he is in league with some of his comrades outside."

The governor smiled incredulously.

"Impossible."

"What if that scoundrel, Tomaso, of whom we were speaking, should be at work?"

The prisoner's eyes glistened at this word.

A slight flash of intelligence passed between the prisoner and the visitor.

It was but momentary, and so slight as to be utterly unobserved by either the jailer or the governor.

"And if such could be the case, sir, what could he possibly do, eh? What on earth, that's what I ask?"

"There's no saying."

"Indeed, you're right."

"Only he ought to be well guarded when you change him from one prison to another—"

"Stop—stop, my dear sir, why change him? He will never leave this place alive," said the governor.

"Never?"

"Never!"

"But surely you don't keep your prisoners all confined in this stifling place?"

"We do, though."

"And never let them breathe the air? Why, it is torture."

"They do breathe the air. At noon every day they are allowed to walk for an hour in the prison yard."

"At noon?"

"At noon."

The visitor fixed his eyes strangely upon the prisoner.

"Very good; if I may be allowed to trespass again, I should like to see how this fellow bears himself in the yard amongst his fellow criminals."

"By all means."

"I'll come, then, at noon."

* * * * *

At noon next day the German traveler was as good as his word.

The governor, full of his wonted courtesy, accompanied him to the yard, where all the prisoners were walking around two and two.

Some of the more desperate men were fastened by a single handcuff to the wrist of another man—a warder.

Of this category was the brigand Mathias.

His companion was a huge fellow who topped him by a head and shoulders, and their wrists were linked securely together by a strong—if slender—pair of handcuffs.

The visitor's countenance fell when he observed this.

It upset all his plans at one fell swoop.

However, he did not utterly despair, but made an effort to get over the difficulty.

"Your excellency," said he, "this is indeed cruel."

"What," demanded the governor, "fastening them to the jailer?"

"Yes."

"I only order it in special cases, such as that of Mathias."

"He is then very dangerous?"

"Well, I scarcely believe that, only such precautions are the established rules."

"I regret that."

"Why?"

"Partly on the score of humanity," was the reply.

"Ah, you would be too tender-hearted," said the governor.

"No. But I also regret it because I hoped to see the brigand more like he appears when not under restraint. I suppose you would not like to set him free?"

The governor shook his head.

"That is against custom, and I should really not like to do it."

The visitor reflected a moment as they walked on.

He could not abandon his scheme now that he had gone so far.

The effort should be made all the same.

They walked up to the porter's lodge beside the gates, where an eager crowd had assembled for a glimpse of the prisoners.

"And do you open those gates to admit the prisoners?" asked the visitor, innocently.

"No, sir," replied the governor; "this little side door is all we open. Now watch how it is done. This bar, which is like a lever, stops the door, and renders it immovable; now—hah!"

The fallacy of his words were shown ere they were uttered.

The visitor whistled in a peculiar way.

And there was a sudden silent rush at the door

in question.

The bar, immovable as it was, fell before that desperate onslaught, and the door was carried off its hinges.

The ragged and miserable-looking mob turned like magic into a crowd of armed desperadoes.

And in they pressed.

On they came, tearing down the gates and dashing everything before them.

The poor gate-keeper was trampled under foot, and the warders and governor got hustled and cruelly handled.

The mob of armed invaders made for Mathias and his companion, and bore them bodily outside the gate.

The brigands then wrenched off the handcuffs. Once outside the gates a horse was found waiting.

Suddenly there was a loud cry heard.

"The soldiers—the soldiers!"

The whole of the guard room had turned out.

A charge was made, and it looked as though the rescue of Mathias were likely to cost them dear.

Cries of defiance and rage were heard.

Just when matters were at the worst for the robber band, a deafening explosion was heard, that shook the solid building to its base.

The soldiers turned back and re-formed at their officer's command.

Then it was that the brigands, headed by the sham visitor, Tomaso, found their chance.

Until now, the retreat had been cut off by the unpleasant appearance of the military.

"There goes the powder keg under the water gate," cried Tomaso. "Lose not a moment. Follow me."

A desperate rush was made, and the brigands got clear of the prison.

The soldiers were divided into two lots, one party being sent in pursuit, the other remaining to guard the prisoner.

The roll call of the prisoners made this discovery.

"How many prisoners have escaped?" inquired the governor.

"Three absentees, your excellency," said the head man of the prison. "One is an Italian calling himself Toro, another is an Englishman calling himself Hunston, and the third is the brigand chief Mathias."

[THE END.]

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